

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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Gorbachev at the United Nations

DISARMAMENT and HUMAN RIGHTS

Socialists will welcome Mikhail Gorbachev's initiative at the United Nations on 7 December. The decision by the Soviet Union to make substantial unilateral cuts in Soviet troops, tanks, artillery and combat aircraft throws down a challenge to the imperialists. Are they prepared, even able, to take the path of disarmament and peace?

The imperialists were totally unprepared for this initiative. An initial lukewarm response was immediately replaced by cold war rhetoric. NATO officials made it clear that in their view the cuts only reduce the overwhelming military advantage of the Soviet Union. More cuts would be needed before NATO could reciprocate in kind. Thatcher welcomed the cuts only because they were an important step towards securing a better balance in Europe in view of Moscow's 'present overwhelming superiority'. Aware of the positive effect Mikhail Gorbachev's speech was having on the public, officials in London were concerned with the increased importance of drawing the public's attention to the 'Soviet side's continuing superiority in conventional forces'. The British media obliged with carefully-doctored NATO statistics. A few days later the Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, reaffirmed Britain's view that the West should proceed with the modernisation of tactical nuclear weapons in spite of the Soviet Union's planned cuts in conventional forces.

Socialism has no need of arms spending other than in a defensive capacity. Military spending constitutes a massive drain on resources which could be used to develop a country economically and raise the standard of living of all its people. The Soviet Union, in particular, needs to drastically cut back defence expenditure, at present 13-17 per cent of national income, to ensure that the resources are available to make *perestroika* a success. The unilateral decision to cut back Soviet troops by 500,000, to remove 10,000 tanks, 8,500 artillery systems and 800 combat aircraft from Europe demonstrates the defensive character of Soviet military forces.

Military spending is a fundamental and necessary characteristic of imperialism which uses its armed forces in an offensive capacity to defend its interests all over the world. During the first six years of the Reagan Presidency - imperialism's global counter-revolutionary offensive - the US spent three times as much on the armed forces as in the previous six years. Between 1982 and 1986 it spent \$1.64 trillion (1 trillion = 1,000 billion); an amount greater than the combined military expenditure of all NATO countries throughout the 1970s. The 1987 CIA allocation was a record \$800 million, and funds for Special Forces, 'low intensity war' experts, have tripled since 1982 to \$1.2bn in 1987.

The so-called superiority of the Warsaw Pact over NATO forces is a myth. NATO's military expenditure in 1987 amounted to \$445bn, with \$292bn being spent by the US. The Warsaw Pact spent \$344bn. NATO has a military manpower of 5.5m, the Warsaw Pact 5m. NATO has 12,683 strategic nuclear weapons, the Warsaw Pact 10,470. NATO has 12,900 combat aircraft to the Warsaw Pact's 10,470. While the Warsaw Pact has superior numbers of tanks, 68,700 to 31,000, nearly half of them are obsolete. The same is true for many other categories of Soviet equipment. More importantly in specific areas NATO's advantage is simply enormous.

In line with the defensive character of its military spending the Soviet Union has not developed the means to move military power over long distances rapidly. It has just four aircraft carriers to the US's 14 massive super carriers and the other NATO countries' seven smaller carriers. The Soviet Union has 20,000 troops in its marine corps with two large amphibious ships to the US's 190,000 troops with 37 larger amphibious assault ships and helicopter carriers (information is taken from *New Statesman and Society* 16 December 1988). Finally NATO's figures exclude Japan whose overall military budget this year was \$29bn, the third largest in the world after the US and the Soviet Union.

All over the world imperialism is prepared to

support murderous regimes and dictatorships prepared to uphold imperialism's economic and strategic interests. It finances gangs of counter-revolutionary murderers which serve as instruments of imperialism's foreign policy with the aim of destroying socialist or progressive regimes - Nicaragua, Angola, Afghanistan, Kampuchea and Vietnam. At the same time it accuses the socialist countries of abusing democratic rights. Gorbachev threw down a series of challenges to the imperialists on these issues.

On human rights in the Soviet Union, Gorbachev stated that Soviet democracy will be placed on a solid basis in particular in relation to freedom of conscience, *glasnost*, etc. He stated that in the Soviet Union there were no longer persons in places of confinement convicted for their political or religious beliefs. The problem of emigration and immigration will be dealt with in a humane way. Gorbachev has said the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice at the Hague on the interpretation and implementation of agreements on human rights should be binding on all states. Can the imperialists follow that lead?



Thatcher - no regard for human rights

Imperialism has an appalling record on human rights. Britain holds the European record for guilty verdicts at the European Court of Human Rights. No other state sends so many files to the European court and no other country loses so many cases. Black and Irish people cannot expect justice before British courts. The Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four, the Winchester Three and the Broadwater Three have all been framed and sent to prison for life with no real means open to them of achieving justice. Britain has a thoroughly racist immigration policy which violates fundamental human rights. Thatcher, coldly calculating, condemns Viraj Mendis to death in Sri Lanka. As the Soviet Union becomes more open and more democratic so Britain under Thatcher clamps down whether by banning the media from reporting the views of Sinn Féin in Ireland or planning to remove the right to silence in British courts. Thatcher's refusal to attend a human rights conference in Moscow in 1991 until human rights are acceptable to her in the Soviet Union is typical of imperialist hypocrisy. She has no problem about visiting the USA where more than two million are homeless and racial discrimination is rife, where the government finances terror throughout Central America. She has no problem maintaining relations with South Africa where Mandela is still imprisoned despite Botha's promise to release him when the Soviet Union released Sharansky and Sakharov and the Angolans freed du Toit.

Our task here must be to welcome Mikhail Gorbachev's speech and use it to build a movement which can force Britain to take the path of disarmament and reestablish the basic rights lost under nine years of Thatcher governments.

The Armenian tragedy

EDDIE ABRAHAMS

So far the death toll from the earthquake which devastated northern Armenia on Wednesday 7 December stands at 55,000 and is still rising. 'Dozens of thousands' are injured and 500,000 are homeless. Armenia's second and third largest towns - Leninakan (pop 250,000) and Kirovakan (pop 150,000) - are virtually destroyed. Many smaller towns and villages suffered a worse fate; Spitak, a town of 30,000, was wiped off the face of the earth.

As the Soviet leadership mounted a massive rescue operation, international aid flooded in from 52 countries along with nearly 1,000 professionals skilled in aiding disaster-stricken regions. The generosity of the British people was enormous with over £1m donated in cash and millions more in aid.

But in the British press, sympathy is also being fostered for the Armenian people on openly racist grounds. Armenia 'is part of the European family, and its distress is not seen as a further extension of Asia's begging bowl' said the *Sunday Telegraph*.

The Armenian people are being presented as a beleaguered Christian community having to withstand not just the tragedy of the earthquake, but also the 'harsh framework of the Soviet regime' and 'persecution at the hands of Moslem Azerbaijanis'. If you are 'European', 'Christian' and of possible use to imperialism, then you deserve help with your disaster.

Imperialism exploits tragedy

This explains why the British government gave £5m for disaster relief. Thatcher does not care about human suffering - she would not give £5m to British pensioners, the NHS, the victims of the recent natural disaster in Bangladesh or the hurricane in Nicaragua. So why



Refugees in Leninakan; 75% of the city was destroyed

£5m to socialist Armenia?

The British ruling class and its press are targeting sections of Armenian reactionaries as potential allies of imperialism within the Soviet Union. As in Poland, so too in Armenia they are engaged in a long term project of fostering ties and alliances with reactionary nationalists. The Armenian disaster has given Thatcher a unique opportunity to disguise imperialist flattery and bribery as humanitarian aid.

Reactionary Armenian nationalism

Unfortunately the material out of which Thatcher hopes to mould a fully counter-revolutionary trend already exists in the form of the reactionary Armenian nationalists. They are using the grievances of the Armenian people to whip up nationalist and racist sentiment and further widen the breach between Armenians and Azerbaijanis and the Soviet leadership. They wish to overthrow the gains which the Armenian people have won as part of the USSR. Some of these elements are grouped in the Karabakh Committee set up to lead the mass campaign to incorporate Karabakh into Armenia.

These reactionaries are the ones fomenting anti-Soviet feeling among the masses by spreading rumours that Armenian children were to be given for

adoption in other parts of the USSR. They are the ones who refused to allow Azerbaijani doctors into Armenia to help treat earthquake victims. They are the ones who, within a week of the disaster, were organising new demonstrations over Nagorno Karabakh.

President Gorbachev rightly denounced these people as 'exploiters' and said 'They are waging a battle for power, and they must be stopped'. Seven members of the committee are now under arrest.

A wide ranging debate has already begun in the Soviet press about the reasons behind the devastating earthquake casualties. Sections of the Soviet and Armenian leadership are undoubtedly guilty of serious crimes. Housing estates and offices, for example, were constructed without regard to the constant threat of earthquakes. The earthquake also exposed the inadequacies of the Soviet civil defence system.

These and many other problems will be openly and frankly debated by Soviet and Armenian communists. They will also discuss with their Azerbaijani comrades the horrifying fact that Azerbaijani reactionaries have been celebrating the deaths of the Armenians. But neither imperialists nor their potential Armenian allies must be allowed to exploit the disaster for their own reactionary ends. ■

Police attack student march

VIRMAN MAN

The government proposes to replace student grants with loans. Education will become a privilege only for those able to pay. Women, black, mature and working class students - those least likely to secure well-paid jobs - will be worst affected. With student grants already cut by 21% since 1979 and plans to remove all benefits (housing, unemployment and income support) to full-time students, financial hardship will increase.

Months of rent strikes, occupations and local demonstrations culminated in a 30,000 strong protest in London on 24 November. On Westminster Bridge 5,000 students were viciously attacked by baton-wielding mounted police. There was nowhere for the students to run. Some tried to climb up lamp-posts, others flattened themselves against walls as the police turned round and charged again.



Mounted police attack

Tublu Mukherjee, from Newcastle University, suffered wounds to forehead and hand: 'at 4 o'clock people started running towards me screaming. Then the horses came. I saw

some people on the ground. Next thing I knew I was down. There was no time to get out of the way.' One student from Leicester described a woman lying with her leg torn open and blood all over her face. 'We didn't know if she was unconscious or not, because the police were shouting at us to "move, move, move".'

The National Union of Students (NUS) had neither expected nor wanted a large turnout. Before the demonstration NUS leaders had told student unions outside London to cancel coaches; during the demonstration NUS stewards told students to leave Westminster Bridge.

Less than 200 yards away in the House of Commons, Neil Kinnock was busy condemning the students as they fell, accusing them of being a breakaway group led by Trotskyists. Since then the NUS has called for action in February - after the deadline for lodging objections to the White Paper on student loans. ■

Organising to defend the NHS

Throughout November and December nurses, midwives and other healthworkers angrily took strike action and began working to grade as health authorities announced their new clinical grading structures. Staff most directly involved in patient care, traditionally undervalued, overworked and underpaid, have been put on the lowest possible grades. They will receive little more, and in many cases less, than they are being paid now. VIRMAN MAN reports.



JOHN STURROCK/NETWORK

grade refused to accept responsibility for assessing care needs; and ward sisters stopped teaching student nurses. After a three-day strike at St George's in Tooting (7-9 November) some night sisters were upgraded.

Kenneth Clarke commented that it was fair to put the lower grades on overnight duty as patients are asleep! On 16 November he ordered DHAs not to upgrade anyone taking industrial action. They were told that any upgrading would have to be financed by cutting patient services. Managers failing to implement the new grading quotas were threatened with disciplinary action. An estimated 10-20% (50,000-100,000) of nurses have lodged appeals against their regrading, which could take years to process.

The dispute shows growing organisation in the health service. At Springfield in Manchester, daily strike committee meetings were held on the picket line. Emergency cover was rotated and wages were pooled. A strike fund was set up, with determined fundraising: 'We had £3,000 in the bucket in the first two weeks - the public were paying us to stay there'. Other hospitals were visited and union meetings addressed.

However, the national leader-

ship of NUPE and COHSE again called separate days of action instead of getting together and organising some effective action.

The Springfield strikers were clear: 'We learned in February that the only thing that the government understands, and the only way forward for us, is industrial action. Also we realised that our leaders were putting a lid on it'.

Locally attempts have been made to narrow the struggle. At a NUPE meeting at St George's in Tooting a proposal to involve others, urging unity between all health service workers, was deemed 'inappropriate' by Branch Secretary, Peter Wood-



cock. When Princess Anne visited St George's to open a new wing during the three-day strike Woodcock urged picketing nurses 'not to ruin her day. I don't want her to be insulted'.

The divisions between health service workers have been exploited by the Tories. The no-strike Royal College of Nursing warned its 16,500 members in Wales not to work to grade and maintained that nurses should adhere to the formal appeals mechanism. Meanwhile 44 members of another no-strike union, the Royal College of Midwives, tendered their resignations at the North Middlesex Hospital, unable to register their protest effectively in any other way.

The Labour Party has been conspicuously silent, despite the widespread public support for the dispute. Robin Cook, Labour's spokesperson on health, at a rally in London on 28 November could only say 'I wish more nurses had voted Labour'.

The Labour and trade union movement has shown no determination to resist. Nurses midwives and health visitors can only win by uniting with the poor and all those who need the National Health Service.

See Letters page 15.

NUPE shop steward interviewed

FRFI interviewed Debbie Derbyshire, NUPE shop steward and nursing assistant at Prestwich Hospital.

What happened in Prestwich Hospital?

NUPE came out on indefinite strike action which lasted for three weeks. The strength of feeling of the nursing assistants against the re-grading forced the COHSE branch leadership at Prestwich to call a ballot for industrial action. The ballot was won, 57% for, 43% against, for indefinite strike action. COHSE's strike lasted one week. The branch leadership was against a strike from the beginning. They wouldn't agree to a joint strike committee with NUPE and they didn't work to get their members out on strike. Having to keep emergency cover on the wards means it takes a lot of organisation to have effective strike action and involve all the membership. COHSE's attitude allowed management to keep the upper hand. I mean on some wards there was more staff there on emergency cover than there would be normally. Even so, when COHSE decided to call off

their strike, they called a mass meeting: out of a membership of over 800 only 90 attended and the vote was only 50-40 to call off the strike.

What was the attitude of NUPE to your strike?

There was no leadership from the NUPE officials to our action, they didn't want us to go on strike. At a rally and demonstration in Manchester they refused to let a striking nurse from Prestwich speak from the platform. We knew that just by going on strike at Prestwich we couldn't force the government to backtrack on the grading, we needed to spread the action and get more nurses to take strike action. NUPE leadership had no intention of doing that, in fact they wouldn't even say we were on strike, they kept calling it a 'protest' action. On 8 December NUPE and COHSE called a day of action against the grading, but instead of organising a massive demonstration in London they said they wanted a lobby of parliament with delegations of nurses from different hospitals. Instead of showing the anger of the nurses against the Tories, they wanted us to speak to MPs.

What's happening now?

After COHSE called off their strike action we carried on for a week and then voted to go back into work. Prestwich Hospital management have formed a grading review committee which is open to unions which sign an agreement not to take further industrial action over the gradings. Both COHSE and the RCN have signed and are now on this committee which is going to go through all the appeals against the grading. In other words both COHSE and the RCN are collaborating with management in the regrading process, because under the Regional Health Authority guidelines no one is going to get a higher grade. NUPE has refused to sign away its right to industrial action and is being excluded by management from any talks about the grading appeals. Because COHSE won't take any industrial action and has over 800 members to NUPE's 250, NUPE has decided not to work to grade because it would be ineffective.

Is this the end of the campaign?

No, when people realise that the appeals system is a farce and all the appeals are rejected, then the dispute will flare up again.

Nurses defend democratic rights on Ireland

After Thatcher's ban on Sinn Féin and the growing attack on the right to free speech on Ireland, Manchester police have taken to vetting demonstrations for 'provocative' Irish banners. They demanded the removal of the Manchester Martyrs Commemoration banner from the Birmingham Six demonstration in Manchester on 29 October, but found they had bitten off

more than they could chew when they tried the same thing on a nurses' demonstration on 17 November.

As the march began police stepped in and tried to get the banner taken down. The main body of the march was a few hundred yards down the road, when the nursing stewards realised what was happening. They called on the demonstra-

tion to turn round and go back - as one steward said, 'they have come to support us, we should support them'. When the police saw that the demonstration was supporting the Manchester Martyrs Committee, they backed down and the banner was carried on the march. And, surprise, surprise, the only people the banner provoked were the police!

Bob Shepherd

NEWS IN BRIEF

South Africa

■ On 1 December 1988 An Khoza, a black 18-year old, died seven floors to his death from a block of Johannesburg flats. The death occurred hours after arrest by security police 'on suspicion of ANC membership'. He was handcuffed at the time to a police claim he 'threw himself over a wall'. There is no doubt that he was murdered by security police.

■ Fourteen young people were jailed on 14 December 1988 on terrorism charges in Cape Town. Ashley Forbes, an ANC commander, was sentenced to 10 years; his four co-defendants were jailed for 10-14 years. Outside the court, police set off a crowd, injuring at least three people.

Britain

■ Scotland Yard has declined to comment on the outcome of the investigation into police brutality during the News International dispute at Wapping. 120 officers were the subject of complaints, and 20 were expected to be served with summonses. At the time, demonstrators were blamed for the violence by both Thatcher and Kinnock. Although the investigation can be expected to be a usual cover-up, this time it may see the tip of the iceberg.

■ The breakaway self-styled moderate union, the UDM, having difficulty convincing members to accept a 7% pay offer from British Coal. Two of proposals by union leaders have been defeated by ballots. Arthur Scargill, President, pointed to the problem: 'they are recommending a package which represents a reduction in real earnings at a time when productivity has risen by 75 per cent.'

■ YTS schemes are not just cheap labour scheme for young people, they are extremely dangerous as well. The accident rate among young trainees on the two-year YTS scheme has risen steeply in the last three years from an annual average of 59 to 100,000 trainees in 1985 to 136.2 in 1988. There were 60 deaths, 130 serious injuries between July and September 1988.

■ The government has announced that the unemployed will in future have to prove they are actively looking for work in order to receive unemployment benefit. As if the odds were weighted heavily on the side of the bosses already, no one will be able to turn down a job on grounds that it is low paid. The government's Christmas promise to the poor and unemployed is to create yet another minefield for claimants.

■ And it's tough luck in the City! The Big Bang was not so successful after all. There is a crisis in the stock market and not enough easy money to go round. Many people wanted to get a slice of the business in 1983, 3,500 highly paid jobs, BMWs and Porsches are no longer the road. And just before Christmas the crisis in the stock market claimed its biggest victim when Morgan Grenfell sacked 4,000 highly paid dealers, analysts and back-up staff. And that's only 5 per cent of the story. The City's capacity in the securities market is 150 per cent of what should be. Morgan Grenfell has taken out only 5 per cent of the staff there is some 45 per cent to go. 45 per cent equals 450 jobs. 45 per cent equals... Happy New Year!

Having awarded a 4% increase across the board in April the government promised to make this up to at least 15.9% after a grading exercise, supposedly creating a proper career structure. In fact, the government cheated the healthworkers by reinterpreting job descriptions. Nationally 86% of the 112,000 nursing auxiliaries are to be given the lowest grade, A, with a maximum salary of £6,300. They are considered to be 'supervised' if a qualified member of staff, when called, can reach a ward in time to assume responsibility for decision-making. Frequently this is not possible: a nursing sister on night duty has responsibility for perhaps 15 wards or 300 patients.

FRFI has obtained a copy of a circular from the North Western Regional Health Authority giving guidance to management that 'length of service is not a factor which puts the enrolled nurse in a higher grade [than C]'. Fiona, with 24 years' experience and eight years' service as an enrolled nurse at St George's Hospital, Tooting, told FRFI, 'on my surgical ward there are 28 cancer patients. I'm always put in charge at nights. We have to do all our work as well as helping the students and the doctors. I still only got a C grade'.

The government claims that only one person can hold 'continuing responsibility' for the

management of a ward or department. Thus only one charge nurse or sister can be graded G. The reality is that hospitals only survive because staff take on the responsibility of more senior posts. Working strictly to the grades they are being paid for would see the collapse of the hospitals within days.

Nurses protest

On 27 November the *Observer* reported that 122 out of the 209 District Health Authorities (DHAs) in England, Scotland and Wales had been affected by strikes, stoppages and working to grade. The initial wave of disruptions started in the psychiatric units and mental hospitals, always the poor relations of the NHS. COHSE members at Springfield psychiatric hospital in Manchester voted for indefinite strike from 2 November. When management closed a ward the strikers occupied and reopened it, forcing management to work on it themselves. At Leavesden mental hospital in Watford, staff began a work-to-grade. By 2am that night all the new gradings were withdrawn. Elsewhere nurses were suspended without pay for working to grade.

Around the country auxiliaries on A grade refused to escort patients outside wards unless accompanied by a registered nurse; enrolled nurses on C

FMLN forces the pace in El Salvador

TREVOR RAYNE

Now that George Bush is US President he will have to confront the failure of Reagan's eight years of war against the Central American peoples. Bad enough for him that, contrary to all expectations, the Sandinistas are still in power in Nicaragua, while the contras are demoralised. Worse still, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) is intensifying the struggle against the US client regime in El Salvador.

Since September 1988 the FMLN has destroyed the strategic Fourth Infantry Brigade headquarters in El Paraiso, causing some 400 casualties; attacked the army's 'Crystal Palace' Armed Forces Planning Institute in the centre of San Salvador on 11 October; and a fortnight later mortared the barracks of the National Guard, again in San Salvador, for over an hour in broad daylight, before blowing up an ammunition dump.

The reactivation of FMLN cells in San Salvador coincides with increased trade union ac-

tivity, the formation of the Movement for Bread, Land, Work and Freedom; a community based organisation calling for insurrection.

With President Duarte dying, his Christian Democrats splitting, ARENA looking most likely to win March's Presidential elections, and a clique of hard-line counter-insurgency officers taking over the military, President Bush is likely to be faced with the moment of decision. Two weeks after the El Paraiso attack, the US government reported to Congress that three US military advisors had exchanged shots with guerrillas who had penetrated the military compound. Estimates put the number of US military advisors operating in the field in El Salvador at around 150. Release of news of the gunfight can be seen as preparing the US public for greater US military involvement in El Salvador. What Reagan began Bush may conclude: the demise of yankee power in the Americas, lost on a battleground that has claimed 70,000 lives in El Salvador alone. ■

New gags for old

TERRY O'HALLORAN

The Tory government is pressing ahead with its attempt to replace the existing Official Secrets Act with a new act which will much more effectively silence any real exposure of the criminal and murderous behaviour of the secret services.

The Official Secrets Bill makes some changes from the White Paper. Releasing information on telephone tapping and information from serving or ex-members of the secret services remains completely illegal with no defence of public interest and no requirement on the government to prove that any harm has been caused. However, in the case of information from foreign organisations the prosecution would have to establish that harm had been caused. There is still no public interest defence.

These concessions are meaningless. Any information worth

reporting will necessarily cause harm: harm to the ruling class; harm to bourgeois governments. 'Harmless' information is irrelevant. This is why the key issue is that of a public interest defence. This, and only this would allow a jury to weigh the 'harm' against the interest of the people.

The Labour opposition mumbles about 'national security' and 'real' secrets pretending that the working class has some interest in common with the state. This is nonsense. The 'real' secrets are precisely the ones we want. We want to know everything about how the ruling class's secret apparatus functions - the better to fight it.

The Official Secrets Bill remains a more efficient, more ruthless instrument for protecting the ruling class against opposition. Our task is not to propose better ways of protecting the 'real' secrets but to develop better ways of uncovering all their secrets. ■

Rail crash kills 34

ZOE MATTHEWS

34 people were killed and more than 100 injured in Britain's worst rail crash for 20 years at Clapham Junction on 12 December 1988.

The disaster came one year after the Kings Cross fire and amidst controversy over cost cutting. Government subsidy to the rail network has been reduced by 50% over five years, with more cuts to come. Rail unions are making the connection between overcrowding, cost cutting and safety. At peak times the South East rail network carries more standing passengers than seated; train drivers work long hours to subsidise poor wages, and technically the whole rail system is at breakdown point.

The same is true for the Underground system. In the rush to privatisation, safety will come a long way down the list of priorities, as it did at Kings Cross.

Following the Clapham crash, an East Putney signal crew member, Steven Jackson, reported that at his station there are four people maintaining the track where there should be eight. In March 1988 a signal light failure, similar to that at Clapham, led to a train pulling out of the station while another was on the track ahead. He had to run out of the signal box with a red flag to prevent disaster. When he reported this to senior management he was told that the last thing they wanted was a public inquiry. It took the deaths of 34 people to force them to act. ■

Deficit ends Tory 'mini-boom'

DAVID REED

On 25 November Tory efforts to convince us about the fundamental health of the British economy were again exposed as hot air. The announcement of yet another record trade and payments deficit for October 1988 showed the Chancellor's Autumn statement given at the beginning of November to be hopelessly optimistic.

Interest rates were immediately increased by one per cent to 13 per cent, the ninth rise in six months, threatening to turn the Tory's spending boom into a new recession. The stockmarket fell 50 points at one stage, recovering to a fall of 38 points at the close - one of the worst falls since the crash.

British exports fell to £8.8bn in October (£7.5bn in September) while imports increased to £9.7bn (£8.6bn) producing a trade deficit of £2.9bn. The balance of payments deficit, after allowing for a surplus of £500m on the invisible account (profits, interest, financial and other service income from abroad) was £2.4bn. This brings the cumulative deficit for the year so far to £12.4bn.

At the time of the budget in March Lawson was predicting a deficit of only £4bn. Even the revised forecast given in the Autumn statement of £13bn for the full year is already off target. And many of the other forecasts are also hopelessly out of date.

Higher interest rates will not only decrease corporate profits, but also by keeping the pound high will reduce the competitiveness of British industry. Growth rates will begin to fall as investment slows down and unemployment will start to rise again. A further rise in mortgage rates is inevitable in the new year which could push inflation to over 7.5 per cent even before the impact of the coming pay round. This is well above the 6.25 per cent predicted in the Autumn statement. Lawson's confident prediction that the economy's present troubles will be shortlived is no longer believed by anybody.

Britain's annual trade deficit is already 3.25 per cent of national income, proportionately higher than the deficit in the US. It is bound to get worse. Foreigners will only hold British debt as long as interest rates are high and Thatcher's policy of keeping a strong pound is maintained. This is speculative money which can be withdrawn at any time. At present the return is two-and-a-half times the rate obtainable in Germany. And as a result the pound exchanges for DM3.20 when a year ago DM3.00 was said to be too high. British exports are being priced out of world markets.

This policy is threatening to force another rapid decline in Britain's manufacturing industry similar to that experienced in 1980/81. This time the effects will be even worse. Manufactur-

ing industry has only recently recovered to the level of output and investment of 1979. At the time North Sea Oil was just coming on stream and by 1985 was contributing over £8bn to the balance of payments. Today it contributes half that amount and its production has gone into decline. In 1980 Britain had a balance of payments surplus of over £3bn, today it has a deficit approaching £15bn.

The temporary economic prosperity of the last few years has been based on a credit boom which has seen a rise in personal sector debt from £90bn at the end of 1980 to £282bn at the end of 1987. There has not been a fundamental transformation of the British economy as the Tories claim. Productivity gains in British manufacturing industry in recent years still leave that industry far behind British competitors - seven years behind Germany, eight years behind France, more than 20 years behind Japan and with no chance of catching up with the US. Wage costs per unit of output rising slowly in Britain are not rising at all in US and Germany, while in France and Japan they are declining.

The government is aware that by the next election it could be in the middle of a recession. That is why it is pressing full speed ahead with its privatisation programme. The aim is to create sufficient revenues to finance tax cuts in the run up to the next election. Privatisation has al-

ready provided the government with more than £17bn between 1979-80 and 1987-88. The recent British Steel shares were underpriced at 125p to attract buyers. Although the shares were oversubscribed, the partly paid shares (60p) are so far trading at around 60p. There are no immediate profits to be made.

With the privatisation of the water and electricity industries, consumers are going to be made to pay a great deal more to fatten them up for sale. Every one per cent rise in electricity prices adds 2-3 per cent to the value of the CEBG. There was a 9% rise in prices last April and a 6% rise is planned for April this year. By the time the electricity industry is sold for about £20bn in 1990 prices could have risen by 25 per cent to ensure an adequate return to shareholders and to cover a 'nuclear tax' for four new power stations. Water privatisation is expected to raise £7bn and it is widely expected that water charges could double. Finally taxpayers have so far paid some £680m in fees to City firms mainly to underwrite the sale of nationalised industries.

With the 73 per cent rise in interest rates in six months, the massive rise in mortgage payments and the proposed increases in electricity charges and water rates, keeping the Tory party in power is becoming a very costly business. It is a cost that by 1990 millions of British people will no longer be able or prepared to pay. ■

Tenants' choice or landlords' charter?

DALE EVANS

The Housing Act 1988 is a drive by the Thatcher government to privatise the huge council housing stock that exists in Britain. With the myth that tenants will be able to choose their own landlord, the Tories hope that huge tracts of public housing will be bought up by property developers, banks, building societies and housing associations.

Under the Act a prospective private landlord can approach the Housing Corporation (the bureaucracy in charge of running the Act) and make a bid for a house, block or estate which is owned by a council.

After obtaining the necessary information about the properties, the private landlord must organise a ballot of all tenants through an independent body. At least 50% of all tenants must take part for the poll to be valid. However, tenants who abstain will automatically be counted as votes for the private landlord. For example, if 70% take part in the ballot and 49% of tenants vote against the bid, then the 30% who abstained will be added to the 21% who voted for the landlord, thus creating a majority.

Recently, in Torbay (Devon), 2,210 voted against the council proposal to sell off the housing stock, 787 voted for. But 2,200 absentions created a 'majority'



for the sale. Tony Key, Tory leader of Torbay council, called this method of ballot rigging a 'consultation ballot'. In reality tenants' choice is turned upside down into landlord's choice.

Also under the Act, tenants face a loss of rights; evictions are easier if there are rent arrears; new tenancies (known as 'assured tenancies') are much weaker legally than the present 'secure tenancies'; legal defences against a landlord's harassment are virtually non-existent. The only right the Tories have enshrined is the right to buy, which they hope will become popular next year when rents are expected to rise as a result of the removal of rent subsidies in the public housing sector.

Housing Action Trusts

Under the Act some council estates in six areas (affecting 25,000 dwellings) are going to be designated as Housing Action Trusts (HATs). HAT estates will initially be run by HAT boards with the eventual aim of selling off the estates to private landlords. Most resistance to the Act has come from tenants affected by these plans. Hulme in Manchester was originally designated a HAT, but a vigorous and well-organised campaign by the residents defeated the proposal. Initially HAT estates had no rights to a ballot, but pressure from tenants has forced the government to accept ballots with a simple majority result. The aims of the HAT policy are likely to collapse as a result.

Organise now!

The so-called 'tenants' choice' has forced tenants to organise. Tenants, alongside their Tenants' Associations, must propagandise, organise and campaign to oppose the Act. On Lansdowne Green Estate in Vauxhall, South London, the tenants' association organised several successful public meetings. The tenants decided to ballot the estate in their own poll to show their opposition. Every dwelling was visited (680 in all) and the Act was explained. 95% of residents expressed their support for public housing. Now all the residents are returning their ballot forms in a postal ballot organised through the Electoral Reform Society. This would give the ballot legitimacy in the eyes of all, but the main aim is to send the results to the Housing Corporation. Depending on the result, the Housing Corporation can stop any private bids for the estate.

Pre-emptive ballots and petitions are only the beginning of the long-term campaigning that must take place against this pernicious piece of legislation. It is only a beginning because over the future period many private landlords with huge resources will attempt to buy council stock and only consistent organisation and vigilance will stop them.

For further information and help contact: Campaign Against the Sale of Estates (CASE) UK, 15 Micawber Street, London N1 7TB. ■



ZEPHANIAH MOTHOPENG

Apartheid's prisoners free

CAT WIENER

The apartheid economy is in crisis: exports and foreign capital investments are falling, due to the (limited) sanctions campaign that has existed. Gold and foreign exchange reserves are being depleted to meet South Africa's foreign debt payment which this month alone amounts to \$400 million. In the face of recession, support has grown for neo-fascist political parties – the Conservative Party and the Nazi-style AWB – from white Afrikaners desperate to maintain their privileges: at the recent municipal elections, the CP made deep inroads into the Nationalist vote. In Conservative-controlled towns such as Boksburg there have been moves by the far-right to re-introduce so-called 'petty apartheid', the banning of black people from the use of all amenities enjoyed by whites.

This is the context of the apartheid regime's macabre contortions over the last month. The last-minute reprieve of the Sharpeville Six on 24 November, followed in the same week by the unconditional release of PAC President Zephaniah Mothopeng and ANC member Harry Gwala, and in early

December the release on bail of Moses Mayekiso and the Alexandra Five and war resister Ivan Toms, must be welcomed for what they are – substantial victories for anti-apartheid campaigners both in South Africa itself and internationally.

However, this 'humanitarian concern' is a facade: the day after the Sharpeville Six were reprieved, Botha hanged five black activists. A new generation of leading activists, the Delmas treason trialists, Ashley Forbes and others, have been sent to jail for the next decade. Thousands of children remain in detention. Jeff Masemola of the PAC, apartheid's longest serving political prisoner, is still in jail. As for the regime's pretence that Mandela is about to be freed, South African law states that a prison is a place where a prisoner is kept, whether it be called a private clinic or a prison house, on prison grounds, behind a prison fence. The press in this country has encouraged the charade: 'Mandela hopes rise!' 'Mandela release edges forward' – instead of demanding his immediate, unconditional release: it is this which all progressive forces must continue to do. The regime has to be forced to release Mandela. This pressure will no longer come from the international economic community, who have been

more than satisfied by this month's manoeuvres.

With an appearance of liberal reform to woo back foreign loans, the reality is intensified repression as Botha seeks to persuade the electorate that he is not 'soft on blacks'. Perhaps the most bizarre example of the apartheid juggling act this month was in Boksburg: fanatical right-wingers, encouraged by their election success, set about reinstituting segregation on every level. Botha and the white South African business community vociferously denounced the moves as 'practices scrapped some time ago' and an 'affront' to human rights (casting an anxious glance at the international community) while refusing to scrap the Separate Amenities Act.

It is not the posturing of Botha and his henchmen that will quell the tide of reaction. The black community who make up 80% of consumers in Boksburg have already organised protest demonstrations and a widespread consumer boycott of white business; action has spread to neighbouring towns. The unity and determination of the black community is ultimately the greatest threat to the apartheid regime, because it is the one force that cannot be mollified or fobbed off before its demands are met. ■

Action needed to defeat the Poll Tax

LORNA REID

The government proposes to give council officials new powers, currently only used by magistrates' courts, to enforce payment of the Poll Tax. Poll Tax officers in England and Wales will be able to send in bailiffs to seize goods, order employers to deduct outstanding Poll Tax and fines from wage packets, start bankruptcy proceedings and apply for deductions to be made from income support payments. They will be able to obtain an all-purpose 'liability order' from the courts to get information from defaulters about their earnings. Failure to provide information can incur fines of up to £400.

Local Government Minister, John Gummer, said on 14 December that the average Poll Tax would be £196.40 in Tory-led boroughs compared to £294.40 in Labour boroughs.

Malcolm Rifkind, Secretary of State for Scotland, refuses to admit that previously-announced Poll Tax figures were underestimates. An earlier figure given for Edinburgh was £313 per head. Labour-controlled Lothian Regional Council, which has submitted to the Poll Tax, has announced that a realistic figure is £420 per head.

On 6 December anti-Poll Tax groups demonstrated outside the council buildings in Edinburgh whilst councillors debated whether to implement an increased Poll Tax of £50 million in cuts. To defuse their anger councillors 'allowed' a delegation into the council chambers to present a petition signed by 2,000 people opposing the Poll Tax. The delegation disrupted the debate and hung anti-Poll Tax banners from the windows. The debate was abandoned when Tory councillors walked out. Labour councillors attacked the demonstrators as 'self-indulgent'. Labour's finance chairman, Councillor Eric Milligan, told the demonstrators they should be outside the Scottish Office. One demonstrator said to FRFI: 'The Tories stop at the bor-

der. Here, it is the Labour Party that is pushing ahead with the Poll Tax. That's why we need to fight them.'

On 21 November the first Committee of 100, pledged to leading a campaign of non-payment, was launched in Glasgow. Donald Dewar, Scottish Shadow Secretary, said the Committee was made up of individuals who were 'acting as such'. Campbell Christie, General Secretary of the STUC, has refused to join it.

200 people attended the National Action Conference Against the Poll Tax on 10 December, sponsored by the Socialist Conference. It was addressed by Alice Mahon MP, Gary Kent, ILP, Stuart Petrie, Pollockshields Anti-Poll Tax Union, Roland Sheritt, Scottish Secretary for the Socialist Conference, and Lorna Reid for the RCG. The RCG argued for a campaign of non-registration, non-implementation and non-payment, built amongst those who cannot afford to pay, uniting all forms of resistance, legal and illegal, by the community, trade unionists, and all those opposed to the tax. We supported the main conference resolution and proposed an organising committee to carry out the conference aims.

The SWP counterposed community based action to action taken by trade unionists. 'There is no way we can win on the basis of non-registration... there is no way we can win on the basis of non-payment... We have to locate our real strength, our strength to take industrial action. In practice this means that in a city like Newcastle the 250 employees in the Finance Department are more powerful than the 250,000 people who have to pay the Poll Tax.'

Describing Committees of 100 as elitist, they passed an amendment to the main resolution deleting support for Committees of 100 and mass non-payment campaigns in favour of support for councils and workers who do not collect the Poll Tax. The RCG rejected this argument in favour of support for all action against the Poll Tax. ■

Poll Tax Conference: report page 14

Chickens or eggs?

The British public will soon have to lose all its illusions about 'Old MacDonald'; British farming is an intensive industry governed by profit-making alone. Chickens have salmonella because they are fed on dead chickens who had salmonella and the mass-produced feed manufactured as cheaply as possible – to maximise profits. Eggs from battery hens or 'free range' hens – the same conditions with or without cages – are infected as a result.

The herbivorous cow is not fed on dead sheep so thousands of cows have become infected with BSE (a brain disease) previously known only in sheep. No-one knows if it spreads to humans.

The final straw came for Currie when 11 egg producers issued High Court writs against her, claiming millions in compensation for loss of business. Currie resigned and the government promised a £500,000 advertising campaign to convince us that salmonella would hurt a fly and agreed to buy the egg mountain at a huge cost to the taxpayer. One of the less attractive aspects of Britain's package is that some of the eggs are destined for the victims of the Armenian earthquake.

The moral? Junior Ministers should note: you can patronise and insult the pensioners, the unemployed, the sick, and everybody else, but you upset the farmers at your peril.

Spreading the bad news

As Britain plunges from ecological disaster to another Nicholas Ridley - Minister of the Environment has abandoned the sinking ship to visit China to advise them about... the environment. Britain, so they say, has a wealth of experience dealing with the environment and it's all for sale at a profit. Watch out for the bean sprouts.

Victorian values

In 1884 Frederick Engels pronounced his views on the bourgeois marriage of convenience: '... this marriage of convenience often enough turns into the crassest prostitution sometimes on both sides, but much more generally on the part of the wife, who differs from the ordinary courtesan only in that she does not hire out her body like a wage worker on piece work, but sells it into slave labour once and for all.'

An entirely unexpected statement from the Duke of Edinburgh urges us to ask – 'has the Prince become a dialectical materialist?' Attempting to justify his love of blood sports Prince Philip claimed that there was a moral difference between 'killing animals for sport and butchering them for money'. He is correct of course, there is a moral difference (cf Chickens or Eggs? above).

Following the unfortunate logic of his own argument (what the booze?) and drawing on his own experience of the marriage of convenience, perhaps he went on: 'I am not sure that doing something for money makes it any more moral. I am not sure that a prostitute is more moral than a wife, but they are doing the same thing.' His wife says he has been eating too many dead sheep. But where will the radicalism of the Royals end, w ask.

Bradford Tories attack children and pensioners

AURIEL FERMO

Bradford Tory Council has lost no time in implementing the £5.8 million of public spending cuts bulldozed through in October. As forecast, the poorest sections of the working class, families on low incomes and the elderly, are already suffering daily as a result.

Working class school children

£3.8 million has been cut from the education budget. 40-50 supply teachers are without work and posts for teachers of disabled children are being left vacant.

The most serious attack has been the 25% a day rise in school meal prices to 80p per child per

day. An estimated 15,000 children who used to have a cooked dinner can no longer afford it. Official figures say 40-50% have stopped having school dinners. But Bradford's Child Poverty Action Group puts the figure at 80%. Many children are now taking sandwiches – some nothing at all. On 13 December Bradford teachers held a half day strike to protest against the cuts.

The Joint Committee of South Asian Organisations which represents the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities, has expressed anger and concern. So too have churches and charities. Bradford mother Elaine Cockroft told FRFI that with three children having school meals you're looking at £48 a month. This is impossible for families

on low wages or family credit. She has set up a petition against the rise and on one Saturday in Bradford collected 500 signatures. Another mother, Kathleen Best, has been petitioning in the Ilkley area with her friends outside schools.

On the same day that pay-offs totalling £100,000 were announced for three top council officials, 40 school dinner staff were given a week's notice. Another 300 will lose their jobs. Cleaning staff have had their hours cut by nearly a half.

Old people

The selling off of 12 old people's homes has begun. On 14 November, Rawdon Crag, with 20 beds, was closed. A pensioner, Miss Jemima Wilson, won leave in the High Court to

appeal against the cuts. This has not stopped the Tories. They will simply delay closing the home where she lives. In protest at the sell-offs, Action Group for the Elderly held a demonstration through Bradford City Centre – 'no return to the workhouse'. About 150 people marched.

Where is NALGO? Where is the Labour Group?

On 18 November NALGO officials did a deal with the Tories. They will not strike or ballot the membership for strike action. They instructed their members to end the work to rule in protest at the cuts. In return, Eric Pickles (Tory leader) had promised there will be no compulsory redundancies. 400 NALGO workers, however, still face redundancy this year.

Nothing has come of Labour's rhetoric. Instead of building on the people's anger, seen on 25 October, and mobilising in working class districts, they have scrambled for cover alongside NALGO to keep their jobs and power.

A NALGO member told FRFI: 'the leadership says they're fighting for jobs, but we're not interested in jobs. It's the service that goes with them: there's no talk of defending services...'

It is people directly affected by the cuts who have started the fightback. Concerned trade unionists, Labour Party members and socialists must break from the narrow self-interested Labour and trade union movement and give their active strength and support to these emerging campaigns. ■

No justice for Broadwater 3

SUSAN DAVIDSON

Winston Silcott, Mark Braithwaite and Engin Raghip were refused leave to appeal on 13 December 1988. They are serving 30 years and life respectively for the death of PC Blakelock during the uprising at Broadwater Farm Estate in Tottenham in October 1985.

A campaign of protest has developed over the last three years against the gross miscarriage of justice of these sentences. There was no forensic, photographic or witness evidence against any of the three men. The conduct of the trials, arrests and methods of interrogation of these three and hundreds more people is now criticised by such respectable bodies as Amnesty International and the World Council of Churches. Eleven Labour MPs and seventeen local Councils now support the demand to reopen the cases. The Public Enquiry panel under Lord Gifford, which included the Canon of Westminster, were 'shocked' by what they found. Also, and most importantly, over 30,000 working class people have petitioned for the release of Silcott, Braithwaite and Raghip.

Despite this, the British state refuses to move an inch. As with the Guildford 4 and the Birmingham 6 the sentences are intended to act as a warning to all who organise against oppression. The guilt or innocence of the individuals concerned is of no interest to the British racist state.

The lessons are clear. It is vital that the campaign for the release

of these three victims of state frame-up continues. If we are concerned at all with the attack on democratic rights then the fate of Winston Silcott, Mark Braithwaite and Engin Raghip cannot be separated from ours.

George Silcott

George, Winston's younger brother, is being harassed by the police. In October he was framed up on a charge of burglary and remanded to appear on 4 January 1989. Until that date he is under house arrest between the hours of 11pm and 5am (curfew). In December he was stopped, searched and abused by five police in the street who said he looked 'like a criminal'. Messages of support to the Silcott family should be sent c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX ■

● Twelve Metropolitan police officers are under investigation following a £20,000 out-of-court settlement awarded to Ace Kelly and his daughter for a series of wrongful arrests, prosecutions and assaults. The Met will also have to pay £50-60,000 court costs. Long-time FRFI readers will remember that Ace Kelly was arrested five times on framed-up charges, including being arrested for 'kidnapping' his young daughter while waiting at a bus stop. At the time Ace Kelly was politically active in the Colin Roach Campaign and the Stoke Newington and Hackney Defence Campaign in which the RCG was a leading force, against police harassment of black people. ■



John Mitchell sacked

CAROL BRICKLEY

John Mitchell, General Secretary of the Irish Distributive and Allied Trades Union (IDATU) has been sacked. He was 'found guilty' of six charges including the letting of a union hall without permission, meeting with Gerry Adams of Sinn Féin, and 'the pursuit of political activities which have been perceived to give the Union an undesirable political orientation not consonant with the views of the National Executive Committee or the membership generally.'

John Mitchell was disciplined in his absence on the basis of a report which he did not see. He

was only shown the charges against him when he agreed to be suspended. In his statement he says:

'Now there are fundamental differences between the Executive and myself on the basis of trade unionism. Specifics include organisation in the Six Counties, relations with employers (I am too aggressive), my preference for action before procedures and the content of trade union literature and publications. In summary my militant support for the members is not liked by the Executive who prefer the ways of the old regime.'

Messages of support should be sent to 380 Nutgrove Ave, Rathfarnham, Dublin 14. ■

Kinnock oils the wheels of repression

MAXINE WILLIAMS

The government is concentrating one of its most sustained bursts of repression against the Irish people. In one month it has introduced three new repressive measures. It has made permanent and more wide-ranging the racist Prevention of Terrorism Act. It has introduced an anti-violence oath aimed specifically at disenfranchising Republican voters. It has cut Irish prisoners' remission from one half to one third. Mrs Thatcher has been galloping around Europe arrogantly attacking other governments for thinking twice before handing over Irish people to face what is laughably known as British justice. Meanwhile on the ground the nationalist people are suffering the worst series of house raids for several years.

In the face of this onslaught the

only serious opposition that Mrs Thatcher has faced has come from the Irish people: an Irish priest who was prepared to starve himself to death rather than accept criminalisation by a British court and four Irish men who took their cases of detention under the PTA to the European Court.

These people, with no resources other than their own determination, have put the British Labour Party to shame. The recent fiasco about the Prevention of Terrorism Act has now made it stunningly obvious that Kinnock's Labour Party is as inept as it is unprincipled. Days before the infamous PTA, which allows suspects to be held by the police for seven days, was to be made permanent, the European Court gave its judgement that by holding suspects for periods of four to six days under the PTA Britain was in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights.

This judgement should have been a gift to the Labour Party which is alleged to be opposed to the Prevention of Terrorism Act. They could have used the European decision to focus opposition against the PTA and force the government to scrap the seven day holding period. But what did the useless Kinnock do with this gift? He decided that in order to continue his wooing of middle class Britain the Labour Party should abstain on the PTA vote. He wanted to make it clear that the Labour Party stood shoulder to shoulder with Thatcher against 'terrorism' and specifically supported the new PTA provisions allowing the seizure of revolutionary organisations' funds. This was too much even for two of his front benchers, Claire Short and Andrew Bennett, who promptly resigned. The government was allowed to escape the necessity to change its seven day holding period.

It takes a uniquely Kinnockite talent to thus snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. It takes a uniquely Labour Party servility to imperialism to fail to oppose a piece of legislation that is a fundamental attack on the rights of Irish people (and indeed international revolutionary organisations, whose funds can now be seized). Even bourgeois Belgium and the European Court have found British standards of justice unacceptable. But the British Labour Party cannot even vote against the most obviously unacceptable face of British justice. Nor should we forget that it was the Labour Party which brought in the PTA in 1974.

As one of the delighted Irish appellants to the European Court said after the victory: 'It's not very often Maggie Thatcher gets beat'. With Kinnock hanging around the neck of the British working class, it is a wonder she ever does! ■

Ryan extradition fails

BOB SHEPHERD

On 13 December the Irish Attorney General threw Britain's extradition warrants for Father Ryan back in Margaret Thatcher's face: 'Senior Tory backbenchers and the British press have created so much hostility to Ryan that his chances of a fair trial have been irredeemably prejudiced.' John Murray, the Irish Attorney General, was expressing in legal language what the Irish and their supporters have always known - no Irish prisoner gets a fair trial in Britain.

Thatcher and the Tory press have been baying for Ryan's blood for weeks, ever since the Belgian government refused his extradition to Britain.

Ryan was first arrested by the Belgian police on 30 June 1988 in Brussels. He was charged with passport offences, but it wasn't until September that the British government asked for his extradition on conspiracy charges. The charges were: conspiracy with persons unknown to murder persons unknown between 21 May 1975 and 1 July 1988; and conspiracy with per-



sons unknown to cause explosions in the United Kingdom.

He was brought to court on 3 November to hear extradition charges. On the same day Patrick Ryan began a hunger-strike for justice against the charges. As he put it: 'I would rather die on hunger strike than be extradited to rot in an English prison'.

The courage of Patrick Ryan in going on hunger-strike forced the Belgian government to recognise that the conspiracy charges wouldn't stand up in Belgian law. As the Belgian Justice Minister said, the charges were 'far too vague and woolly'. On 25 November Ryan was flown from Belgium to Ireland. The plane took a detour en route

to avoid flying over British airspace in case it was forced down by the RAF.

Thatcher did not lose the opportunity to show her contempt for small nations which have the audacity to overlook her wishes. The Belgian government was 'weak in the fight against terrorism' and the Irish government should have arrested Ryan as soon as he got off the plane. Taking her lead the Sun described Ryan as the 'devil in a dog-collar'. All this turned out to be their own undoing. These were the grounds used to refuse extradition.

Thatcher now blew all her fuses, accusing the Irish of 'a great insult to the people of this country'. Kinnock, treading the fine line between toadying and abject toadying decided that Thatcher's real failure was that she bungled the affair: 'I understand the Prime Minister is very disappointed. That is shared by many others including myself, but she is also culpable. She blew the possibility of extraditing Patrick Ryan.' Everyone outside the ranks of the British ruling class and the toads is jubilant that, for once, these bloodsuckers have been denied their feast. ■

British terror: martial law in West Belfast

BOB SHEPHERD

In the most extensive raids since November 1987 the RUC/Army have been wreaking havoc in Belfast and Derry. The official RUC figures are 1,100 properties raided. In fact over 1,500 homes have now been raided with some nationalist estates being under siege for fourteen days in a row.

In early November, St James, Poleglass and Turf Lodge areas of West Belfast were sealed off with roadblocks. All vehicles leaving or entering were searched. On 7 November Rockmount was sealed off at 8am and raiding parties forced their way into ten homes, ripping up floor-

boards and damaging walls. Mrs Eileen Carey, whose house was raided, said: 'This has now become a weekly occurrence. They arrive early in the morning and stay for five or six hours. Each time they select around ten or fifteen houses and raid them'. On 8 November at 5am all entrances to the Twinbrook estate were sealed off and the army/RUC raiding parties began house to house searches.

On 9 November, Turf Lodge was sealed off and a huge force of soldiers/RUC began raiding hundreds of homes. The home of the Donnelly family was wrecked in a raid lasting thirty hours! The kitchen was gutted, every cupboard, piece of furniture, cooker and kitchen equipment included, was ripped out

and thrown in the garden. Gas, electricity and water were cut off as pipes and wires were ripped out. Every floorboard was ripped up and holes smashed in walls. This is the second raid in a month on the Donnellys. On 17 November 12 homes were raided in St James. On 22 November, the Beechmount area was sealed off in a major operation and businesses and homes raided. The next day the raids continued. Ardoyne was sealed off on 25 November. An 82 year old woman's house was wrecked.

The nationalist people have met this terror with resistance. They have been protesting in the streets and as Ardoyne was being searched, the IRA launched a grenade attack. The raiders withdrew. ■

Gibraltar revelations

MAXINE WILLIAMS

The British government has been quick to put the lessons of Gibraltar to good use. The inquest into the shoot-to-kill murders of three unarmed IRA volunteers, opened in November six years after their deaths. As in Gibraltar the government used Public Interest Immunity Certificates to hide the truth. The RUC murderers were not even present at the inquest. The families withdrew from this white-wash affair.

Meanwhile there are revelations about Gibraltar. Kenneth Asquez first claimed to have seen an SAS man with his foot on Sean Savage's chest as he shot him in the head, but withdrew this evidence at the inquest. He claimed he had only made the statement about seeing the SAS because he was pressurised by Major Bob Randall. Asquez has now said that Randall did not pressurise him. Thus he has withdrawn the only reason he has ever given for making that first damning statement. It is clear that Asquez did witness murder. What form of pressure made him lie at the inquest?

The second revelation is the role of Inspector Revagliatte. He was in the police car that sounded its siren as it passed Mairead Farrell and Danny McCann. Most people assume that this was the signal for the SAS to start their butchery. But Revagliatte told the inquest he was out on routine patrol that day and just happened to start his siren as he hurried back to the police station. What has since been revealed is that 'routine patrol' Revagliatte was in fact the officer in charge of the police firearms group for the operation on that day. Yet we are expected to believe that he did not know his armed squads were in operation and just happened to be cruising past the killing area! Piece by piece the truth is coming out. ■

● The Sun newspaper is paying 'substantial damages' to Carmen Proetta, one of the Gibraltar witnesses, for printing a totally fictional article in an attempt to discredit her evidence.

Viraj Mendis fights on

On 20 December 1988, Viraj Mendis entered his third year of sanctuary. In a year marked by further defeats for the working class movement – the P&O strike, the nurses, the passage through Parliament of the new Immigration Act, the Housing and Education Bills – the Viraj Mendis Defence Campaign has stood firm. Despite two years of gruelling battle, the VMDC retains the mass support necessary to continue its fight to save Viraj's life. EDDIE ABRAHAMS reports.

Viraj's life is in imminent danger. Everything the VMDC has said is truer now than two years ago – and especially about the mortal danger Viraj would face in Sri Lanka. Reports are emerging of government sponsored death squads killing hundreds of opponents. In November, the Sri Lanka tourist authorities advised all

tourists to leave, so close was the country to disintegration and bloodshed caused by the rise of the viciously chauvinist anti-Tamil JVP.

Professor James Manor, a specialist on Sri Lanka, affirmed in a memorandum to the Home Office that 'it is from the JVP that he [Viraj] has most to fear'. He concluded 'that there is a

high likelihood that Mr Mendis will be dead within a few months of his return to the island...'. Equally significant is testimony from the bourgeois and anti-Tiger Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) General Secretary A Amirthalingam who wrote to Douglas Hurd on 22 November:

'Any party or person who stands for progressive views and actions are eliminated in Sri Lanka... I am afraid if Viraj Mendis... is deported his life will be in great danger... No Sinhalese who resides in the UK dares speak on behalf of the Tamils. They become marked – men or women. It is also a fact that workers at the airport and railway terminals and in the police and army are supporters of the JVP.'

The government in Sri Lanka has virtually lost control. According to the *Financial Times*, 'the State Administrative Services Association told the President that its members were unable to carry out their duties in most parts of the country'. Former Finance Minister Ronnie de Mel stated that 'The government's writ does not run beyond Colombo – and the army

camp and police stations outside'. On average 30 people are being killed every day with mutilated and blindfolded bodies being discovered every dawn. Even in the centre of Colombo, hundreds of JVP prisoners managed to escape from two top security prisons, no doubt with aid from the police and prison warders sympathetic to them.

Yet Douglas Hurd and Timothy Renton are consciously ignoring these facts. They are refusing to lift the deportation order against Viraj. The reason is that Viraj is a black communist, a member of the Revolutionary Communist Group, who for five years has resisted the racist Home Office. Viraj Mendis and the VMDC stand for successful organised resistance to Thatcherism.

We can expect no justice or remorse or compassion from the Home Office. Only one thing can save his life – a massive surge of support for the VMDC from the working class and progressive movement.

Act now. Contact the VMDC and begin to campaign in your community, trade union, organisation or workplace. ■

VMDC, c/o North Hulme Centre, Jackson Crescent, Manchester M15 5AL.

Statement from Viraj Mendis:

'When I went into sanctuary two years ago, David Waddington, then Home Office Minister, said the Home Office would not raid the sanctuary. Now two years later, Renton, his successor, has said they will raid the sanctuary to deport me. What has changed? The danger I face in Sri Lanka is ten times greater than it was two years ago. This proves that the ruling class has no concern for my life. It is however seriously concerned by the achievements of the VMDC and the beginning of a sanctuary movement. It wants to deport me, despite the danger in Sri Lanka, in order to undermine our achievements and defeat the emerging sanctuary movement.

I call on all socialists, democrats and progressives to make a stand with us and to give Maggie Thatcher a well earned defeat.'



VMDC pickets Home Office

With the situation in Sri Lanka daily growing more and more dangerous for all progressive and democratic Sinhalese, the VMDC mounted a mass emergency picket of the Home Office on Thursday 1 December.

Over 100 people including contingents from the VMDC in Manchester and the RCG demanded an immediate lifting of the deportation order against Viraj. The Tamil Action Committee also joined the protest alongside the Newham Monitoring Project, Third World First, the Reverend David Haslam and MPs Pat Wall and Bob Sheldon. The demon-

strators presented 20,000 petitions to the Home Office demanding that the case be re-opened so that the real evidence about Sri Lanka could be examined.

Besides threatening Viraj's life, the British ruling class, with its aid to the Jayewardene regime, has also been instrumental in the continued repression against the Tamil people and progressive Sinhalese. The VMDC therefore took the opportunity to honour those thousands slain by the regime and the JVP death squads by laying 100 flowers in their memory. ■

VMDC national speaking tour

CHRIS PROCTOR

By 20 December, marking Viraj's second year in sanctuary, the VMDC will have spoken alongside Jean Hughes and Sidney Hollander – representatives of the US sanctuary movement – at 23 public meetings in 16 cities across the country.

Meetings were held in London, Cambridge, Bristol, Norwich, Birmingham, Coventry, Wolverhampton, Leicester, Sheffield, Bradford, Leeds, Newcastle, Glasgow, Liverpool, Ashton and Manchester.

Both the platform and the audience

of all meetings have shown the broad range of support for the VMDC. Speakers have included the RCG, the Labour Party, the SWP, Jewish and Christian representatives, the Newham Monitoring Project, solidarity organisations and anti-deportation campaigns.

The tour has organised campaign supporters across the country to respond to the Home Office's refusal to lift the deportation order despite the current situation in Sri Lanka. It has also prepared campaign supporters to act immediately the House of Lords announces its decision on Viraj's appeal. ■

Victory against the police

JILL

On Wednesday 7 December, following two and a half days of hilarious police evidence, the case was dismissed against eight comrades arrested at the RCG organised picket of the Manchester South African Airways on 11 July. The eight were charged with Section 5 of the Public Order Act – 'words or behaviour likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress'. All eight are prominent members of the RCG and VMDC and their arrests were part of the police campaign to undermine the political organisation of the VMDC.

The defendants laughed as the 'insulting and abusive words' they had allegedly shouted at the police were put to the court. In a rare display of teamwork, each officer declared that he had heard the words 'fascist pigs' quite clearly above the 'very loud noise' they were complained to about. Each of the eight had their own personal variation on the theme. 'Fascist pigs support apartheid! Down with our oppressors!' screamed Sarah. Colin said 'Look at the fascist pigs oppressing our rights!', while

Sonia jumped up and down in a threatening manner.

The police continually claimed that the pavement had been obstructed but every one of their own photographs showed the picketers well back from the kerb. Louise had been arrested by Sergeant Marchmont for 'gesticulating in my face' and shouting 'down with apartheid'. Police photos 9-26, however, showed her standing still and silent. Photo 35 showed the Sergeant moving in to arrest Louise – she is standing still with her mouth shut and her hands in her pockets.

Even before the prosecution case had been completed, the Clerk of the Court was recommending that the case be dismissed. On Wednesday the Bench threw out the case on the grounds that the police evidence was unreliable. The eight are now considering suing the police for wrongful arrest.

All 12 RCG and VMDC activists arrested for protesting at the impending execution of the Sharpeville Six have now won their cases. Once again the VMDC and RCG have shown that organised defence can defeat police persecution. ■

FIGHT DEPORTATION

NOTES



MILITANT MARCHES

On 4 November 120 supporters joined the VMDC and the Justice for Steven Shaw Campaign in one of a Friday marches which was diverted past Bootle Street Police Station in protest against the arrest and detention of Adrian and Sonia the previous week. A week later, P&O strikers from Dover, sacked miners from Nottingham and the North Staffs Miners Wives Support Group all joined the march. This was followed by a rally and social in the sanctuary to raise funds for the P&O strikers.

VIPS VISIT VIRAJ

Among the many visitors still flooding in to the sanctuary was MP signor Bruce Kent of the CND, who expressed his solidarity in the following message: 'Thank God for sanctuary. Long may it last – till you are free.' Other visitors have included Harry Cohen MP and Jeremy Corbyn MP.

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

The VMDC has been visited by Australian and New Zealand TV both of whom are screening documentaries of Viraj's case. International support has also come from Zimbabwe, southern Africa and Japan where a supporter has filled in and returned twelve petition sheets.

INSPECTOR SWANN HARASSES VMDC

At a recent meeting with Bootle Street police concerning arrangements for the weekly marches, Inspector Swann expressed his outrage at the presence of the Manchester Marty Commemoration Committee banner on the previous march – a banner which bears the colours of the Irish tricolour. 'What the bloody hell has the IRA got to do with Viraj Mendis?' Swann spluttered. Inspector Swann may not have realised it, but the VMDC has built immense support among all those fighting British racism and injustice, including the Irish people.

SUPPORT FROM SINN FEIN

On 22 November, Sinn Fein Foreign Affairs Bureau sent a message of solidarity to the VMDC to 'reiterate our support for Viraj Mendis and our ongoing opposition to the British Home Office's threat to deport him'. The letter also restated Gerry Adams' 'personal support' for Viraj. What do you think of that, Inspector Swann?

VICTORIES AGAINST THE HOME OFFICE

In the past three months there have been victories for people fighting deportation. Leove Bongay won her right to remain. Tinu Olowokanga and her six children have also won. A Marion Gaima has won a recent appeal and £30,000 damages against the Home Office. All three fights have been helped and inspired by the example of the VMDC.

Sarah Rice

Shujaa Moshesh (previously Wesley Dick) was released from prison in August 1988 after serving thirteen years. He was arrested, with two others, in the Spaghetti House siege of 1975. Before his arrest he was a political activist in the black community and it was the political character of the Spaghetti House siege that led to heavy sentences against those involved. Inside prison Shujaa was a well-known fighter for the rights of prisoners and played a leading role in numerous strikes and protests. For this he was victimised and lost most of his remission. Terry O'Halloran and Maxine Williams interviewed him shortly after his release.

Could you tell us about your experiences as a black prisoner? How the racism of the system operated?

You have to bear in mind that I was arrested for opposing the state although of course they criminalised us. But basically we were fighting racism outside and when we were arrested and put in prison it was just a continuation of that struggle.

Racism in prison is far more intense than it is on the streets. Right from the word go we were confronted with racist practices by the screws and the governors. Some things sound petty but they affect the life of the prisoner involved. For example when you're going up for dinner you'll see a white prisoner get two eggs and a black

chiatrist said he had an 'overdeveloped sense of justice'.

I regret that I only got a glimpse of the report on me. They say all kind of things. I remember one prisoner I know was called 'evil, ignorant and an absolute degenerate' by a screw who had known this prisoner for about three days. That statement alone could keep a man in prison. It's not what is said that is the point but the power that lies behind those words especially if you're a lifer. They can leave you in there literally for life. If prison officers don't like your resistance, they can write all kinds of things about you in a report which is going in front of governors and parole officers.

Do the authorities see black prisoners as a threat because they are organised? It's not all black prisoners who are organising just as it's not all white prisoners who are not organising. Generally you can say that the average black prisoner is more politically aware than the average white prisoner mainly because of the whole process of racism that he's confronted with outside. He's got a general awareness of not just racism but society as a whole that is at a higher level than the average white prisoner. On that basis there's generally a tighter sense of unity among black and minority prisoners.

What was it like being a political prisoner when you first went in to prison in 1975?

There was a whole heap I learned when I was in prison especially from people who were more conscious than me, mainly the Irish guys. This was the first time I had been to prison facing a big sentence and it was a shock. At the same time I wasn't prepared to tolerate the racism right from the very beginning. Which is why I did thirteen years when I was only supposed to do twelve and I should have been out long before that.

I lost a week's remission while I was on remand because me and the screws clashed. Either you cower to them or you resist. They don't have to physically beat you - which they do anyway, they don't have to verbally abuse you - which they do anyway. It's their whole attitude; it's hostility, 'you're a nigger, we're the commanders and if we tell you to jump off the landing you jump'. The problem is if they tell me to jump off the landing I'm staying right where I am and that's where the conflict comes.

In 1975 I met the Balcombe Street guys and some of the Guildford Four were in Brixton at the same time as me. I was already politically conscious and I started moving around with people of a similar mind. Sean O'Doherty was the first Irish prisoner I met. In prison I was meeting people who were giving me the Irish liberation point of view. The first thing I noticed which impressed me was their commitment to the Irish struggle. They're not half-way guys. So even now, thirteen years later there's people left inside who are as committed now, even more so, than they were thirteen years ago. You have to admire that in any people. Nelson Mandela is the same thing.

Irish prisoners in the early days got rough treatment from other prisoners.

The average English prisoner is conservative so they used to look upon Irish prisoners in the same way as the government does. In Parkhurst an English prisoner attacked an Irish prisoner. There was only one or two other Irish prisoners in the prison, so they were outnumbered. The Irish guy and the English prisoner were moved to the Scrubs. It's generally known that these Irish guys do not mess about, they are serious guys. It would have come down to a full scale war if a guy, who I used to call Dr Henry Kissinger as a joke, some kind of peacemaker, hadn't intervened and settled it between the English and the Irish. We black guys heard about it and we were prepared to go on the side of the Irish guys. Another incident was in Parkhurst where screws opened the doors of two English prisoners and they attacked an Irish prisoner. Any kind of English hostility against black and Irish prisoners the screws will support because it's in their interest to keep prisoners divided as well as matching their own racism.

We had a lot of political discussions, were involved in protests and strikes. They proved the level of their political commitment. It was a learning process; I'm sure I learned more from them than they learned from me. They used to ask me questions about aspects of the black struggle and we used to have good political discussions.

They gave me a lot of support. For example when I was in Gartree, through the racist practices of the governor there (he was known as Exocet until he had a bucket of shit thrown over him and then he was known as shithead), I refused to work. I didn't work anyway but this was official. They were fining me and I was refusing to sew mailbags. So I didn't get any pay for two months. Every week for two months four Irish prisoners - Liam Baker, Johnny Ace, Sean Kinsella and Tip Guilfoyle used to buy stuff for me. I used to flash it in front of the screws and say 'I'm all right, I've got this'. It's that kind of action that showed their commitment to back up prisoners who are fighting against the system.

The impact of Irish prisoners has been positive. It's through their fighting for their rights that other prisoners can sit back and say, even if they don't like the Irish prisoners, they have to admire them for their resistance. In a lot of their struggle they've been isolated and alone. Two or three Irish prisoners will be fighting for something that's of benefit to all prisoners but they would be the only ones because all the other prisoners say 'well they're Irish they've got no chance of parole'. The English prisoners have still got this hope of getting out whereas the Irish prisoners are not restricted by what I call the parole syndrome. It's been a long struggle for them but they've gradually earned the respect not only of the prisoners but even of the screws.

Did other prisoners see the advantage of solidarity from these examples? Yes and no. Take the average English

"RACIS PRISON IS MORE INT THAN ON STRE

"I wasn't prepared to tolerate the racism right from the very beginning"

prisoner get one. Or recently when John Alexander, a prisoner in Parkhurst took the Home Office to court about working in the kitchen. I was in prison for thirteen years but I only ever saw two black prisoners working in the kitchen, one was in Hull, one in Blundestone. Not that I want to work in any kitchen anyway but if people want to work in a kitchen they shouldn't be discriminated against on the grounds of colour.

Some prisons are known to be more racist than others, Wandsworth and Strangeways. In the local prisons where prisoners aren't supposed to be doing sentences or only short term, the racism is more intense than in the dispersals. Because black prisoners are going to be in the dispersals for some time the screws don't want too much hassle; they know that if there's racism in the prisons, black prisoners will resist it.

Black prisoners suffer more from practices like 'nutting off' (sending prisoners to mental hospital)?

Prison doctors' and prison staff views fit in with the general theory of how society's rulers see people. They put it in the framework of white men are middle class. They want prisoners to fit into this image. So if they have a black man in there from Jamaica or West Indies, or Africa, who doesn't talk what they see as good English, they question his educational abilities. If he is putting up some kind of resistance to the racism he is in great danger of being nutted off. It nearly happened to me. I can think of several guys who've been sent to Broadmoor or Rampton.

During the trial of Jimmy McCaig and John Bowden there was a psychiatric report given on McCaig and one phrase stuck in the mind. The psy-



SM IN S FAR ENSE THE ETS"

prisoner who would look upon himself as a criminal, they can keep up a resistance while they're out on the street but once they're arrested 'it's a fair cop guy'. So if they get a sentence of twenty five years they'll sit down and do it. This is one thing that baffled me. And the longer the sentence the more it baffled me. I cannot understand why a prisoner accepts the sentences they do. Whereas Irish prisoners saw it as their political duty to escape. Now English prisoners say 'I've got a twelve year sentence maybe I'll get parole'. So you get that basic difference in attitude and therefore a different performance and activity in the prison. And this has led to certain conflicts between English and Irish prisoners. Over here in England, prisoners accept their sentences. That is the major difference between prisoners in this country and all over the world. I used to read about escapes of prisoners in Peru, Brazil, South Africa - all over the world. That couldn't happen here.

This attitude also affects whether you're going to have a strike for a pay rise for example. As you know prisoners are paid an insult for wages. I never worked but the wage I was supposed to be on was less than £5 per week. The conservative attitude is an eternal damper on any resistance or any movement towards change by prisoners.

When I got my sentence I was put on D wing in Scrubs. The majority of people there were doing life sentences. I was under the impression that everybody would be wanting out. But then I met up with the damper. There may be a man determined to escape but for that one there will be ten who don't want to and some of them will be prepared to go to the authorities and grass in the hope that they might get parole.

Parole is one of the most serious questions. Before 1983, before Brittan's announcement on parole, the average parole was about 15 or twenty months. Some got four or five years. Before '83 parole was the best form of control. Then there was the outcry about increase in violent crime. So they said no parole for those doing five years or for violence or drug trafficking. I remember I was in Wakefield when I heard this on the news. I was shocked. I knew I wasn't going anywhere for the next four or five years. I thought the whole prison system would go up. The average prisoner expected to get some parole. Then suddenly they are making prisoners who are already captured responsible for what people were doing on the streets at that time. It's a double punishment.

But I went downstairs and people were still playing snooker and watching their Coronation Street as though nothing had happened. I was amazed. Nine of us got together and made some petitions and said we were going to strike the following week in opposition to Brittan's announcement. Out of 160-170 prisoners on my wing only another three people signed it apart from us nine. We tried to organise a national strike and there were strikes in other prisons.

People look at it from an individual not a collective point of view. Brittan said there would be parole for those categories in exceptional circumstances. Everyone thinks of themselves as an exceptional circumstance. It's only now that the effects of that announcement are being felt. People are realising that the policy is continuing. Every now and again to justify holding people longer the government talks about rising crime.

What effect did FRFI have in terms of organising in the prisons?

I came across FRFI in 1981 when I was in Hull. An Irish friend of mine had the paper and I read it so I wrote off. FRFI is important for prisoners as a whole. There's a lot of prisoners isolated. They want some kind of political feedback, some hope. FRFI gives

them some hope by showing that it is possible to fight against repression that they're facing every day. When I read it the first page I turned to was the Prisoners Fightback to read about who was where and who had done what to who.

At first only Irish prisoners had it but its circulation has grown. It sets forward ideas of organisation about prisons which prisoners need. When I came to prison it was after PROP (National Prisoners Movement) and there was nothing. FRFI has continued and is in contact with more prisoners. I see it as a foundation of organisation. It gives people ideas and shows there are alternatives so long as you're prepared to fight and organise for your rights. So it's had an important effect on prisoners.

There haven't been any big protests in English prisons since the Scrubs and Albany in 1983.

This is one reason why I wrote to FRFI about the prison movement last year. If there's no solid struggle then it's hard for you on the outside to know what's going on. They're still murdering prisoners but it's on a low level. When a serious riot or disturbance takes place you can respond. But between big events a lot of political work needs to be done. So prisoners do need to keep writing and letting you know what's going on.



The Albany and the Scrubs protests resulted in a limited victory and won some legal representation for prisoners.

Even now the state is biting into that. You can get legal representation on their say-so. It should be automatic. I was charged with assault last year. In fact they assaulted me. But when I asked for legal representation it was refused. So I didn't participate in the proceedings, was found guilty and lost more remission. They know that if they give prisoners legal representation, 85% of their charges are going to be kicked out.

At one point you linked your demands for prison rights to the position of prisoners in the Six Counties who got half remission. Now that right to half remission is being removed.

If parole is going from a half to a third in the Six Counties there is going to be a lot of disappointment for people. The state is cracking down. It's just a continuation of the brutal policies of the British in trying to break down resistance in Ireland.

When half remission was introduced in 1976 in Northern Ireland prisoners felt that the same should happen here. So prisoners started organising for half remission here. Half remission was introduced in Ireland as a result of the hunger strikes which the British claim to have defeated but that is open to debate. Prisoners in the Six Counties were given their own clothing, food parcels. So we organised around these issues. This led to national strikes in the dispersal prisons in '80, '81, '82 and '83.

We were organising strikes each October in an attempt to better our conditions. The strikes themselves were successful and were supported by the majority of prisoners but we didn't gain anything. We didn't just need one strike a year we needed constant resistance in any form necessary. The Irish prisoners won conces-



"Prisoners in the Six Counties were given their own clothing, food parcels. So we organised around these issues"

sions after four years on the blanket. When I think of those hundreds of prisoners making that kind of protest, not including the hunger strike itself! We used to argue that British prisoners wouldn't need to have to do half of that to get these things introduced here because they were already in operation there. So we would be riding on the coat tails of the Irish struggle so to speak. We could have got some changes but we couldn't get the support needed.

If you want something, major changes, you have to fight for it. If prisoners in Britain really want half remission, food parcels or four visits a month they have to fight for it. The state will not give prisoners these things on a plate. What you've got in prison at the moment is a lot of angry individuals who want changes in their individual conditions. They're suffering in the blocks, they're moved out on lie downs. Those individuals cannot change the system. They're made to suffer all the more, they're used as examples. The need for collective action in prison is paramount. Otherwise individuals will continue to suffer. Whatever the action the prisoners choose - strikes, refusing to bang up, riots - whatever is necessary to bring about change. Obviously the state is going to resist, that is expected. Prisoners don't have any choice. Either you fight or you suffer.

Prisoners in Ireland have an active movement of support from relatives and from a political movement. Do you see that as necessary here?

The Irish have built a tradition over many centuries of struggle and resistance. Irish people help their people inside. You don't have that kind of tradition in Britain. Individuals in Britain have support from their relatives but not prisoners as a whole. So they have to start building up those links in the families and communities. To introduce a culture of resistance. Because of the experience of racism the average black prisoner is more conscious and aware. Black prisoners have built up a certain culture of resistance, not on the same scale as the Irish prisoners, but it is at a higher level than the average white prisoner.

The white prisoners they've got families and friends helping them but not a political basis. Whereas black prisoners are beginning to do that. This is part of the function of the organisation I have been working with since I came out, the African Caribbean Prisoners Support Group. We support black prisoners in their struggles against the system and we

maintain links with them and their families and give them support. This culture of resistance is being built up. That is what is needed in the prisons as a whole.

A lot more prisoners are breaking out of the stranglehold of the parole system. A lot more are saying they're going to fight for their rights. So I can be optimistic. But it still needs collective political action and decision making and it must come from the prisoners themselves. They have to make their own decisions. They obviously want as much support as they can get from outside.

The Labour Party and trade unions don't campaign for prisoners rights at all.

The majority of people who go to prison are not millionaires. If those people in the city are involved in criminal actions they don't go to prison they get knighthoods. The ones who go to prison are the men of the broke pocket tradition. The trade unions and Labour Party who claim they're fighting for the working man should have some kind of policies as regards prisoners. The fact that they haven't done this isn't an oversight but a deliberate policy because of the association with criminality. But the question isn't would they take a pro-prisoner stand but have they in the past? Prisoners have been there before the Labour Party. If they haven't taken a stand for prisoners yet why should they do so in the future? When Labour are in power it's only a continuation of the same conservative policies. I was inside under Tory and Labour governments and I saw no difference.

What sort of changes do you notice politically since you went into prison?

I was arrested in '75 and there was a general feeling that the revolution was coming if not today then next week. Since Thatcher got into power there has been a resurrection of fascist ideology. The capitalist class has done well for itself but everybody else has been made to suffer.

It's a matter of an ebb in the tide of history. In some periods the progressive forces are making progress and moving forward and in other times it's a period of reaction. We're in the era of reaction now. Not just in Britain but across the west as a whole. The revolutionary parties have to regroup and rethink to combat the rising power of the forces of reaction. ■

TREVOR RAYNE

HISTORY WILL ABSOLVE ME

From the ranks of the populist, bourgeois-led Orthodox Party Castro assembled a group of one hundred and fifty young militants to attack Moncada Barracks, Santiago in Oriente Province on 26 July 1953. Among them was Fidel's brother Raul. Half of the assailants were to die, most after torture, many went to prison. The official communist party of the time, the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP), denounced the attack: 'We repudiate the putschist methods, peculiar to the bourgeois political factions - the heroism displayed by the participants in this action is false and sterile, as it is guided by mistaken bourgeois conceptions'. The PSP remained overtly critical of Castro until late summer 1958 when it could see who was going to win.

Eight years after Moncada, Raul Castro explained the event: 'It was not a putsch designed to score an easy victory without the masses. It was a surprise action to disarm the enemy and arm the people, with the aim of beginning armed revolutionary action... it marked the start of an action to transform Cuba's entire political, economic and social system and put an end to the foreign oppression, poverty, unemployment, ill health and ignorance that weighed upon our country and our people'.

Castro was among those captured and imprisoned. His trial began on 21 September 1953. A trained lawyer, Castro conducted his own defence; it was a ringing denunciation of the Batista regime, and a manifesto for a popular national revolution. *History Will Absolve Me*, Castro's defence speech, was later reconstructed in prison and smuggled out for publication and circulation. To do this from within Batista's torture cells was an act of tremendous bravery and defiance. Castro explained: 'Propaganda must not be abandoned for a minute, for it is the soul of every struggle'. And in another letter, 'There is one thing I feel to be taking from within myself: my passionate desire for sacrifice and struggle. I have nothing but scorn for an existence attached to the wretched bagatelles of comfort and self-interest'.

Castro identified three principal social forces that would determine his revolutionary strategy and alliances: 1) the big landowners, reactionary clergy and transnational corporations represented by Batista; 2) the national bourgeoisie, capitalists in contradiction with imperialism, but among whom only the most progressive would support a revolution; 3) the masses, 'the 600,000 Cubans without work... the 500,000 farm labourers who live in miserable shacks;... the 400,000 industrial workers... the 100,000 small farmers who live and die working land that is not theirs, looking at it with the sadness of Moses gazing at the Promised Land... the 30,000 teachers and professors... so badly treated and paid; the 20,000 small businessmen weighed down by debts; the 10,000 young professional people who find themselves at a dead end... These are the people, the ones who know misfortune, and, therefore, are capable of fighting with limitless courage'.

Following protests and in an attempt to court legitimacy, Batista released Castro and the survivors of Moncada on 15 May 1955. The 26 July Movement was formed, independent of the Orthodox Party. Castro opposed the immediate launching of armed struggle: 'We must first exhaust every political means so that it is seen that we do not desire war'. The regime's play at democracy was short-lived; it feared the rising movement. Castro's name was cheered when mentioned in public. Moncada proved a propaganda victory. Publications that printed Castro's ideas were



CUBA

THIRTY YEARS OF REVOLUTIONARY ADVANCE



'When the Rebel leader and his procession entered Havana, bathed in peasants' sweat, with a horizon of mountains and clouds, beneath the burning sun, up a "new stairway of the winter gardens, climbed history with the feet of the people"' (Che Guevara)

Batista fled Cuba at 2am on 1 January 1959. A military junta replaced him. The Rebel leader, Fidel Castro, called for the struggle to continue, and ordered Camilo Cienfuegos and Che Guevara to lead their guerrilla columns into Havana. Workers and peasants across Cuba responded to Castro's call for a revolutionary general strike. The revolution triumphed. A giant had stood up in the Caribbean: the first socialist revolution in the Western hemisphere. As he entered Havana on 8 January amidst hundreds of thousands of cheering Cubans, Castro reportedly ordered that 50,000 rifles and machine guns be imported. After five years of struggle, imprisonment and exile the revolution had only just begun. Castro was 32.

banned, as were his radio broadcasts. Public meetings were stopped and even any public reference to Castro was banned. On 7 July 1955 Castro set sail for Mexico convinced that he must prepare for armed struggle.

SIERRA MAESTRA LIBERATED ZONE

In Mexico the first priority was to form a nucleus of revolutionaries, united in aim, ideology and discipline. There Castro met the Argentinian doctor Che Guevara: the Cubans used the nickname 'Che', a popular Argentinian greeting. Che and other guerrillas were arrested by the Mexican police serving Batista. Castro had to pawn his coat for money to publish the 26 July Movement's first manifesto. Eventually the guerrillas were released and on 25 November 1956 set sail for Cuba in the tiny yacht *Granma*. Castro set the tone: 'We will be free or we will be martyrs'. Just 82 comrades waded ashore to do battle with Batista's thousands of US-equipped troops.

Speaking in 1966 Castro remarked that 'in truth we can affirm that our revolution began under incredible conditions'. Indeed it did! As soon as they disembarked they were strafed by Batista's planes. They tramped through swamps, sucking sugar cane for moisture and nutrition, were betrayed by their guide and ambushed. Under a hail of bullets Che recalled 'I was faced with the dilemma of choosing between my devotion to medicine and my duty as a revolutionary soldier. There, at my feet, were a knapsack full of medicine and a box of ammunition. I couldn't possibly carry both of them, they were too heavy. I picked up the box of ammunition

... Amid the chaos of bullets, dead and wounded 'I heard a voice - later I found out it was that of Camilo Cienfuegos - shouting "Nobody surrenders here"'. The landing was meant to coincide with an organised rising in Santiago. The rising failed.

Eighteen partisans regrouped and commenced guerrilla war from the mountains of the Sierra Maestra. Castro decided that the balance of forces in the Sierra was favourable; it, rather than Havana, would be the centre of the revolution. Here were the peasants and rural workers who would form the core of the Rebel Army. The best recruits from the underground 26 July Movement in the cities were sent to the Sierra; all weapons were sent to the Sierra.

Che described the guerrilla war as one of 'constant mobility, constant distrust, constant vigilance', never sleeping in the same place two nights in succession. 'What followed then was a nomadic stage in which the Rebel Army went about conquering zones of influence. It could still not remain in them very long, but neither could the enemy army... Various battles established a vaguely defined front between the two sides'. Within the liberated areas the Rebel Army 'issued its penal and civil codes, dispensed justice, distributed food supplies, and collected taxes in the zones it administered'. Prisoners taken were treated humanely, their wounds treated, and they were turned over to the Red Cross. The guerrillas paid the peasants for the food they took.

A major victory was won at El Uvero on 27/28 May 1957, a well armed garrison with an airfield. Thirty per cent of the forces that went into battle were killed. With Castro's

guerrilla army established and providing the main focus of opposition to the regime, other opposition forces sought alliances with the 26 July Movement, their representatives trekking up the Sierra to meet Castro. Among them were leaders of the Orthodox Party, the PSP, and the student-based Revolutionary Directorate. Bourgeois politicians put their signatures to manifestos with that of Castro. However, Castro insisted on certain principles: no imperialist interventions; no military coups; the release of political prisoners; and no rejection of any bloc or organisation that represented a sector of the masses.

From February through to April 1958 waves of strikes and demonstrations crossed the island. On 9 April the 26 July Movement called a general strike: it failed. Many cadres in the cities were rounded up and tortured and killed. It had been inadequately prepared, and the PSP failed to mobilise the unions: distrust between 26 July Movement and PSP cadres remained. On 3 May at a meeting in the Sierra, Castro's line of prolonged guerrilla warfare won out against those who favoured insurrections and spontaneous workers' strikes. The task ahead would be seizure of the central provinces and destruction of the entire political-military apparatus of the state. However, the guerrilla army, with just 200 rifles, faced 10,000 heavily armed troops encircling the Sierra. The offensive was defeated, the enemy losing 1,000 men and 600 weapons! On 21 August Castro ordered Che and Camilo to lead two columns down into Las Villas Province. What followed was a masterpiece of warfare.

'During a month and a half, two small columns, one of 80 and the other of 140 men, constantly surrounded and harassed by an army that mobilised thousands of soldiers, crossed the plains of Camaguey, arrived at Las Villas, and began the job of cutting the island in two'. Che explained the subjective element in the battles: the guerrilla puts his life on the line, goes without luxury, faces the rigours of nature, 'the enemy soldier... is the junior partner of the dictator. He is the man who gets the last crumbs left by the next-to-last hanger-on in a long chain that begins on Wall Street and ends with him. He is ready to defend his privileges, but only to the degree that they are important. His salary and his benefits are worth some suffering and some dangers, but they are never worth his life. If that is the price of keeping them, better to give them up, in other words to retreat from the guerrilla danger'. By December the island was cut in two and, combined with a fall in sugar prices, the regime was in economic and political crisis. Now the capitalists would call on US intervention or face revolution.

Castro struck firm and hard. On 29 December Che and Camilo took Santa Clara in the middle of Las Villas. Within four days they were in Havana.

SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

Some 20,000 people had been killed in the liberation war. Castro and his young guerrillas allowed bourgeois anti-Batista politicians to take over the government, but they had the guns, they had defeated Batista's army, they had the backing of the people and they had the power. They faced a largely rural population with an

average annual per capita income of \$91.25; of these people, 11% drank milk, 4% ate meat, 36% had intestinal parasites, 14% had tuberculosis, 43% were illiterate, 2-3% had running water and 9.1% had electricity. About a third of the workforce were totally or partly unemployed.

The first of a series of land reforms was enacted on 17 May 1959. The large latifundo estates were expropriated and turned into state farms. The United Fruit Company was dispossessed without compensation. Land was turned over to small farmers, cane farms were made into co-operatives. US President Eisenhower authorised the training of Cuban exiles as an invasion force. The revolution put 600 war criminals to the firing squad. Castro's bourgeois allies began to desert in the face of the progressive character of the revolution. The CIA organised 300 counter-revolutionary organisations in Cuba and abroad. In October 1959 Cubans in US-supplied planes dropped counter-revolutionary propaganda and incendiary bombs on Havana. On 6 July 1960 the US sugar import quota from Cuba was cut off. So began an attempt to destabilise and economically strangle the revolution. Castro retaliated nationalising US-owned sugar mills, and within three months had expropriated the rest of approximately 1 billion dollars worth of US-owned assets including Ian MacGregor's Amax mining interests, plus Shell Oil's investments. At the beginning of 1961 the US broke off diplomatic relations.

As the invasion force approached on 16 April 1961 Fidel Castro announced the socialist character of the revolution. On 17 April, while the US Navy carried out a diversion off Cuba's west coast, a force of 1,400 Cuban counter-revolutionaries, including US agents, landed at 2am on the Bay of Pigs. Castro personally directed the counter-attack using Soviet-supplied weapons, while the workers and peasants of the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution rounded up thousands of counter-revolutionary sympathisers in the cities. Castro understood the meaning of their victory: 'The invaders have been annihilated. The Revolution has emerged victorious. It destroyed in less than 72 hours the army organised during many months by the imperialistic government of the United States'. Four B-26 bombers with CIA pilots were shot down. US imperialism was humiliated. The gains of the national democratic revolution had been preserved only by taking it forward to the socialist revolution. What Lenin had lived and understood Castro had repeated: the continuous nature of the revolution.

Later that year, on 1/2 December 1961, analysing the revolution during a five hour speech, Castro explained: 'We had to make the anti-imperialist, socialist revolution... The anti-imperialist, socialist revolution could only be one, one single revolution, because there is only one revolution. That is the great dialectical truth of humanity: imperialism and, standing against it, socialism'. He thumped the table in front of him and shouted:

'I am a Marxist-Leninist and I shall be a Marxist-Leninist until the last day of my life.'

Today in Cuba, a Third World Country, there are no child fire-eaters at the traffic junctions, no queues at the private blood banks, no crowds of prostitutes filling the city squares, no beggars. Cuba has an infant mortality rate of 13.5 per 1,000 to rival that of most countries in the world. It has an illiteracy rate far lower than that of the USA. More than half of its skilled labour force are women. Its prisoners are paid a living wage. These are the gains of Marxism-Leninism.

VENCEREMOS (WE SHALL WIN)

ANDY HIGGINBOTTOM/TREVOR RAYNE

The apartheid regime was driven to the negotiating table: it cannot accept a truly independent Namibia any more than imperialism can accept a socialist Angola. UNITA has pledged to carry on fighting the Angolan government, and the Reagan-Bush administration has pledged to carry on financing it. The transnationals that rob Namibia of her minerals, under South African military protection, do not intend to leave. The agreement is an indication that the balance of forces in southern Africa are beginning to tilt in favour of liberation and against racism and imperialism.

If the agreement is implemented, 3,000 Cuban troops will leave Angola by 1 April 1989, when a UN supervised electoral process will begin. Apartheid had demanded that 15,000 Cuban troops depart before they begin implementing the election and UN Resolution 435. By August all Cuban forces will have withdrawn north of the 15th Parallel, about 190 miles from the Namibian border, to a line from Namib Harbour to Cuito Cuanavale. By 1 November, when the elections are due, the Cubans will have moved north of the 13th Parallel, by which time half of the Cuban troops will be out of Angola. By 1 April 1990 two thirds of the Cubans will have left, and six months later three quarters. Finally, by July 1991 all Cuban forces will have departed from Angola.

South Africa has agreed to reduce its force of over 50,000 troops down to 1,500 within three months of 1 April 1989. UN peacekeeping forces will supervise the elections and monitor Cuban withdrawal from Angola. The Soviet Union and United States will participate in a joint commission of appeals, which Namibia will join upon independence.

Speaking before the Brazzaville Protocol was signed, President Castro warned the racists and their bankers: 'If we have to be there 10 more years, we have courage enough to do it rather than surrender our principles'. Thirteen years of Cuban sacrifice, alongside their Angolan and Namibian comrades, were not going to be frittered away in short-cuts to appease diplomatic circles. The phasing of the Cuban withdrawal gives enough time for apartheid intentions for Namibia and Angola to reveal themselves, and for UNITA to

NAMIBIA PEACE AGREEMENT

Freedom struggle continues

South Africa, Angola and Cuba signed the Brazzaville Protocol on 13 December 1988. A formal treaty is scheduled for signature in New York on 22 December. Fifty thousand Cuban troops will be phased out of Angola over the next 27 months, and Namibia will attain formal independence by 1 November 1989. SWAPO's Information Secretary, speaking in Lusaka, welcomed the agreement.

be hammered, which it will be without a South African life-line.

APARTHEID IN RETREAT

Ever since Angola's independence in 1975, when George Bush headed the CIA, the United States has been campaigning to destroy the Marxist MPLA government which it has never recognised. Jonas Savimbi's UNITA counter-revolutionary bandits receive military hardware and \$100m a year from the US. The US introduced the concept of 'linkage', making the withdrawal of South Africa's army from Namibia dependent on Cuban troops leaving Angola.

Imperialism has considered the removal of Cuban troops a top priority. A communist force in southern Africa was waging a defensive struggle for the survival of a revolutionary government. That communist force itself appeared legitimate to much of Africa and the Third World. It has been at the centre of forging a powerful revolutionary army in Angola. That army, composed of Cuban, Angolan and SWAPO fighters, delivered a stinging blow to the South African Defence Force at the battle of Cuito Cuanavale last year. From then on imperialism has maintained frantic diplomatic pressure to try and get an agreement.

Apartheid could not hold aloof from the negotiations. Some 2,000 of its soldiers were trapped inside Angola; motive enough for it to sign the August 1988 'ceasefire' that led to the Brazzaville Protocol. Further, apartheid's economic crisis is driving it to accept imperialism's political direction in exchange for credits to bail it out.

Speaking to FRFI Comrade Vekui Rukoro, President of SWANU, suggested additional reasons for apar-

theid's willingness to negotiate at this time when it has shunned previous overtures: their forces were defeated. They have lost air superiority in southern Angola and they no longer have the ability to engage in hot pursuits with impunity. This weighs heavily on the South African military especially at a time when the End Conscription Campaign is making modest advances. We have 18 year olds resisting the system, questioning the very foundation of apartheid South Africa.

'As well as this, Botha attaches great importance to his recent safari to black Africa. Those visits were made possible by an unwritten understanding that he was going to move and make significant progress in Namibia - should he let Namibia go, black Africa would be accommodating.

'There is also the deteriorating economic situation. They are spending over R4 million a day to maintain the occupation forces in our country.'

Apartheid is working flat out to replace the aircraft lost over Angola with jets from Israel and Argentina. At the same time Botha's African tour is an attempt to recoup South Africa's regional and diplomatic prestige. As 1988 ended UNITA bases in northern Namibia along the Caprivi Strip were being strengthened as launching pads for forays into Angola. An independent Namibia would have to deal with these bases.

Meanwhile, imperialism is now intent on forcing the Angolan government to negotiate with UNITA. This the MPLA government has thus far steadfastly refused to do. Imperialism will seek to bolster UNITA leader Savimbi's credentials by providing him with another international tour, while at the same time attempting to cajole the Soviet Union, with a mood of 'conciliation', into putting pressure on the Angolans to negotiate with him. They calculate that incorporating UNITA into the

Angolan government will undermine the revolutionary process.

NAMIBIA'S FUTURE

South African repression inside Namibia continues. The offices of *The Namibian* newspaper, strongly critical of the occupation forces, were gutted in an acid and fire attack. Liberation activists are assaulted and thousands of school children have fled the country to avoid detention and torture.

If South Africa is forced out of Namibia, it wants to leave behind sufficient economic, military and political structures that will defend its interests. For imperialism, the ultimate condition on Namibian independence is that it must not endanger white racist rule in South Africa itself. Further, supplies of strategic minerals including uranium must be maintained.

There are different political positions in Namibia on the way forward. SWAPO has been careful to minimise the threat of a SWAPO government to the interests of the white minority or the South African and British multinationals which dominate the economy. 60 per cent of Namibia's land is owned by whites who constitute 6 per cent of the population. SWAPO will only purchase land for nationalisation that is held by absentee landlords. SWAPO's latest policy document promises a mixed economy with 'a measure of control over the country's resources... a balance of just economic returns to the Namibian people on the one hand, and reasonable profits for foreign and local private shareholders on the other.' Following the Brazzaville Protocol, the SWAPO Information Secretary suggested that a SWAPO government would not allow the ANC military bases in Namibia, when he said they would treat the ANC in the same way as did Botswana and Zambia.

The need to mobilise the people inside Namibia is seen as the top priority by SWANU, as Vekui Rukoro explains: 'The task for SWANU over the coming year is to enhance at an accelerating rate the fighting capacity of the Namibian masses. We believe that it is only by investing in the Namibian people as workers and as fighters that we can topple the system, and topple it quickly... our people are in readiness to make a great social revolution, and to go beyond it to enter the era of people's war under the leadership of a genuine vanguard party. That is what we aim to transform SWANU into.'

Time will tell and the Namibian masses will decide on how the struggle goes forward. Meanwhile communists and anti-imperialists in Britain must step up pressure against the Thatcher government's meddling in southern Africa, oppose Thatcher's forthcoming visit to the region, demand that RTZ, Consolidated Goldfields and other British transnationals turn their assets over to the Namibian people, and challenge every attempt to give Jonas Savimbi and UNITA a platform in Britain. ■



'Staying put'. Apartheid's army in Namibia.

Home Office to crack down in prisons

TERRY O'HALLORAN

The Home Office Prison Department (now calling itself the Prison Service) is planning a crackdown in the guise of phasing out MUFTI (Minimum Use of Force Tactical Intervention) squads. The plans are revealed in a secret Internal Prison Service circular leaked to *FRFI*.

The circular, CI 58/1988, issued on 17 November, is called 'The control of violent and recalcitrant inmates'. It is intended 'to improve the Service's state of preparedness to deal with inmate violence, and changes in techniques to deal with violence on a large scale' (para 1).

As usual there is some introductory guff about the need 'to contain and manage difficult, recalcitrant or violent behaviour by persuasion and other means which do not entail the use of force' (para 2). Notice how 'difficult' and 'recalcitrant' behaviour is treated as synonymous with 'violent' behaviour. Is a prisoner who insists on his or her rights 'difficult'? Is a prisoner who refuses to submit to arbitrary and illegal behaviour 'recalcitrant'?

Read on for an answer. 'The use of force must continue always to be regarded as a matter of last resort, whether staff are confronted with a passive demonstration, non-violent resistance, or acts of violence whether by individuals or groups acting in concert.' Again violent and non-violent protest are lumped together. What 'last resort' justified the use of systematic violence, resulting in more than 60 prisoners being injured, to break up the passive demonstration in Wormwood Scrubs 1979: the first admitted use of the MUFTI squads?

The circular then tells us that 'situations sometimes arise in which the use of force is necessary in order to prevent an inmate injuring himself, other inmates or staff, or damaging property; and in certain circumstances to achieve compliance with prison discipline when other methods have failed or are inappropriate' (emphasis added). There you have it. The Home Office is telling prison staff that they can use force to 'achieve compliance with

prison discipline'.

Now it is clear why 'difficult' and 'violent' behaviour are blurred together. To obscure the illegal character of the Home Office's advice. The law only gives prison officers the right to use such force as is reasonably necessary to prevent the commission of a crime. The Home Office makes no reference to the law. Instead it says: 'In such circumstances, no more force must be used than is necessary to deal with the particular situation' (para 3). The same thinking is enshrined in the Prison Rules.

Having established what it laughingly calls 'general principles', the circular gets down to business. Since 1984 prison officers have been trained in C&R (control and restraint). C&R 1 covers restraint of an individual prisoner or breaking up a fight and teams of three to disarm and/or remove a prisoner from a cell (para 6). C&R 2 covers self-defence techniques and teams of twelve to deal with a 'disturbance by a group' (para 6). The next stage, up to now, has been bringing in the MUFTI squads.

MUFTI now, however, is to be replaced by C&R 3. C&R 3 is based on teams of 36 (three teams of twelve) who will have 'newer-style helmets, flame-retardant suits', 'shields', 'protective gloves, shin/knee guards' and 'specialist protective boots'. Male officers will have new 'side arm batons' and female officers will have 'kubotens' (paras 8-10). Kubotens are the type of batons used by US and Canadian police with a handle projecting at right angles.

All officers will be trained in C&R 1 and C&R 2 self-defence. 'A body of officers' in each prison will be trained in C&R 2 teams of twelve and C&R 3 (para 12). Over 4,000 officers will be trained in C&R 3. This is far more than the numbers involved in MUFTI. This target is to be achieved by 31 March 1990.

In short MUFTI is to be replaced by a bigger, better trained, better equipped riot squad with a unit in every prison. As is always the case with Home Office doublespeak, phase out means crackdown. Prisoners and their supporters have to act now to prepare for this next phase of repression. ■

Armley 'Hell-hole'

ALEXA BYRNE

On 29 November Charles Greechan, 19, became the fourth young man to

be found hanged in Armley jail in the last six months. Alan Skey, 17, Michael Elliott, 18 and David Littlewood, 19, were also found hanging from the bars of their cell windows. All four were on remand.

These deaths have brought Armley back into the news. Filthy conditions, overcrowding, 1,300 men locked up 23 hours a day. Prisoners, probation officers and solicitors tell of beatings from the prison officers, bullying and intimidation.

Una Padel of the Prison Reform Trust described Armley as a 'totally alien and hostile environment' and demanded urgent investigation into the prison. Prisoners have attempted suicide by slashing their wrists or tying their sheets together as nooses. The family of Charles Greechan describes the prison as a 'hell-hole'.

More than 32 prisoners, many on remand, have killed themselves this year. Disgusting conditions, brutality and despair in British jails are driving working class men and women to their deaths. ■

POWs birthdays

Natalino Vella No. B71644 HMP Parkhurst Newport Isle of Wight PO30 5NX	24 December
William Armstrong No. 119085 HMP Full Sutton York YO4 1PS	26 December
Liam McCotter No. LB 83693 HMP Frankland Finchale Avenue Brasside Durham DH1 5YD	2 January

FRFI sends Christmas and New Year greetings and solidarity to Irish POWs and all readers of *FRFI* in British prisons.

Govan by-election: a vote for resistance

Neil Kinnock ordered an immediate inquiry into Labour's defeat and described the result as 'a protest vote by the people of Govan against Mrs Thatcher'. Kinnock is fooling no one. It is clear that the result was both a protest vote against Thatcher and against the Labour Party's insistence that parliament and only parliament is an acceptable vehicle for challenging Thatcher. Returning another Labour MP to wait for the next General Election with no guarantee of a Labour victory was not an acceptable answer to the increasing poverty and despair created by Thatcher. The Govan electorate issued a warning to Kinnock that they are tired of the parliamentary game and of the Labour Party's refusal to campaign against the burning issue of the Poll Tax.

The Labour Party controls all the major Scottish Regional and District councils. It had 50 of the 72 Scottish MPs. But by the time of the Govan by-election they were popularly known as the 'feeble fifty'. The Poll Tax was the major issue of the by-election. After the result was announced the streets of Govan rang to the tune of 'We won't pay the Poll Tax'. Four fifths of Govan voters are opposed to the Poll Tax. One in three say they won't pay.

Throughout the campaign Bob Gillespie, the Labour Party candidate, who says he personally will not pay the Poll Tax, toed Kinnock's line against a campaign of non-payment and illegality. Gillespie stated he would not campaign around opposition to the Poll Tax because 'it has split the Labour Party and obscures more important issues'. In the run up to the election day, Scottish Labour MPs involved in launching the Committee of 100 which is pledged to not paying the Poll Tax, postponed their launch date till after the election to avoid embarrassing the Party. With arrogant contempt for the Govan working class, the Labour Party conducted their canvassing over the telephone, US style. How many pensioners and unemployed people have a telephone at home in Govan?

Jim Sillars placed opposition to the Poll Tax at the head of his campaign. Sillars argued for an alternative to Labour's subservience to the Poll Tax. His message to the people of Govan was 'Don't pay!'. Sillars and the SNP favour a campaign of non-payment built among the communities, headed by those who refuse to pay through principled opposition. The SNP refused to unite with the STUC in a campaign against the Poll Tax. Sillars said it would be 'the unity of the graveyard with the STUC'. He hit back at the Labour Party's 'impotence': 'While Robin Cook and Gordon Brown are being applauded for their debating victories in the House of Commons, Mrs Thatcher is paving Scotland end-to-end with poverty and rising despair'.

Scottish independence was a secondary issue in Govan. Sillars and the SNP are committed to Scottish independence and a complete break from Westminster. However, the Scottish working class does not fully back this. Whilst 39% of Scottish people want important powers for a Scottish Assembly just 14% want complete separation from England and Wales.

Whilst we recognise the right of the Scottish people to independence, it is not today in the interests of the Scottish working class or of the British working class as a whole. However, a fighting Scottish Assembly could take forward the immediate

The SNP victory in the Govan by-election on 10 November was a rejection of Thatcher's vicious attacks on the Scottish working class and of the Labour Party's complete failure to defend it. The result, a 33% swing to the SNP, which overturned the Labour Party's 19,500 majority was a disaster for the Labour Party. They were rejected in Govan because they have proved to be totally useless in opposing Thatcher. Having rejected the working class as its electoral base, the Govan by-election has shown that the Labour Party has no other base from which to challenge Thatcher. LORNA REID assesses Labour's defeat.



Jim Sillars MP

interests of the Scottish working class, for example on the Poll Tax. The result of the Govan by-election shows that there is a groundswell of support for such a strategy. But Kinnock, the Unionist, ever loyal to the Crown, described Scottish nationalism as 'one of the most unhealthy sentiments in politics'. The most unhealthy prospect for the Scottish working class is the continuation of poverty and despair imposed by Thatcher, permitted by Kinnock.

The bulk of the British left, often fond of voting Labour 'with no illusions', recoiled in horror as the people of Govan rejected Labour. 'Ghastly news from Govan', moaned Paul Foot of the SWP, 'the Labour Party is founded on the working class... when workers in large numbers shift their allegiance from a working class party to a petty bourgeois party, there is not the slightest comfort for any of us'. Doug Chalmers, the Communist Party candidate, condemned Jim Sillars' 'several amazing attacks on

the Labour movement'. Jim Sillars' only 'amazing' attribute was his guts to state the truth about Thatcher and the inability of the official Labour movement to fight back.

However, nobody should have any illusions about the ability of the SNP to wage a real fightback. Despite their voiced opposition to the Poll Tax, in the council they control, Angus, they are eagerly implementing the Poll Tax.

While the SNP cannot truly represent the interests of the Scottish working class because of their ties to Scottish capital and absence of a socialist programme, the result of the Govan by-election is good news for all genuine socialists committed to building a new movement. The people of Govan demonstrated on 10 November that they are ready and willing to fight. They are steps ahead of the left who would want to hold back that fight in favour of the now 'feeble 49'. ■

As you approach the 14th anniversary of your conviction and imprisonment what are your thoughts and feelings now about the situation with your case, especially since the appeal rejection?

The appeal was a watershed in an important way for me. All six of us went to the appeal with an open mind; we believed that the case for our innocence was now sufficiently strong enough to budge them, and we were understandably quite hopeful or optimistic about the outcome of the appeal. In other words, we felt that all the important legal arguments had been answered or won. Nothing that happened during the appeal, during the actual examination of the evidence, caused us to change our feelings about that. But of course our appeal was eventually rejected out of hand. That was a terrible blow, and one that made me realise that the whole thing was a charade, a game that we were never really going to be allowed to win anyway. Now I'm more convinced than I've ever been that there is no such thing as British justice, it simply doesn't exist in reality.

You know, at the end of the day the establishment just closed ranks on us in order to uphold our wrongful conviction. They conspired behind the scenes to actually pervert justice. What we were ultimately confronted with at that appeal was a deliberate and calculated cover-up, a brick wall that simply wouldn't listen or respond to the truth; in fact wasn't really interested in it. As far as I was concerned it only illustrated what so-called British justice amounted to - injustice and lies.

How closely affected, do you imagine, is the fate of your case by the course and development of Britain's military involvement in Northern Ireland?

Well, it's obvious that the British government is intensifying or stepping up its war against the IRA, and I think that this is obviously reflected in the legal system's treatment of, or attitude towards, our own case. At the time of our arrest and original trial we were alleged to be IRA members, and as far as the government is concerned we are now IRA prisoners. At the very least we are here in prison because of the war in Ireland, and the question of whether we remain here or are released is obviously bound-up in an important way with what happens in Ireland, or at least influenced by it in an important way. At the end of the day, I don't think what happens or has happened to us can be separated or looked at in isolation from what Britain is doing in Ireland.

We had hoped that the free-state government would take a more active role in our behalf, but the extent of its collaboration with Britain, highlighted in particular by the extradition business, obviously prevents it from genuinely supporting us or the campaign for our release. Before our appeal we got all sorts of messages that the free-state government would be really pushing to get us out, but at the end of the day they've done basically nothing to help or support us.

I feel very depressed about the continuing situation in Northern Ireland and the stepping-up of Britain's war there because it inevitably means that myself and the other five have a long way yet to go before we're likely to ever be released.

How broadbased would you like the campaign for your release to be?

Let me answer that in the following way. Public opinion immediately after the Birmingham pub bombings allowed the police to pick up six innocent Irishmen and torture confessions out of them. It allowed them a completely free hand to do as they pleased in terms of framing us and then getting us convicted. Now it will

Since the Appeal Court turned down their appeal the Birmingham 6 have continued to fight to bring their case to public attention. Some of their relatives recently took up the case with the Soviet government and received a sympathetic response. Throughout the world thousands know of the appalling frame-up of which the six are victims. In the following interview JOHN WALKER, one of the Six, makes clear their determination to fight on. The interview was carried out by JOHN BOWDEN, a fellow prisoner of his, who has corresponded regularly with *FRFI* for several years. The interview was circulated to *FRFI* and other left newspapers. It is regrettable that *the next step*, paper of the Revolutionary Communist Party, chose to print an abridged version of this interview as an 'exclusive'. The truth about the Birmingham 6 is not 'exclusive' to anyone - it needs to reach as many people as possible. We are pleased to publish the interview in full.

"Our appeal was rejected out of hand"

be public opinion that ultimately gets us released. I therefore ask ALL progressive groups and organisations who are genuinely committed to the cause of justice to join and support our campaign, to highlight and publicise our case amongst as many ordinary working class people as possible. We desperately need public support, and we need it from all sections of the population, especially from working class people.

You know, since we were arrested in 1974 people's perception of the police in this country has changed considerably. I think that black people, especially, have always known what the police are really like; but now even white working class people are beginning to wake up, and the miners' strike in particular forced a lot of ordinary working class people to change their opinions of the British police. I think that today, as opposed



John Walker

to the time when we were first arrested, a lot of people are prepared to accept that we are the victims of a blatant injustice; all we now need is for more and more people to actually come out and support our campaign. Because at the end of the day the struggle for justice in this country is the duty and responsibility of everyone. The working class must fight for justice on all possible fronts, which includes the fight to win the release of innocent Irish people imprisoned in this country on trumped-up charges.

Over the years in prison one thing that I have come to realise and understand deeply is that our situation is but one dimension of a much wider thing involving the suppression of Irish people, and I suppose, ultimately we're talking about the suppression of whole groups of people by this system, both here and throughout the world. I strongly be-



Patrick McKenny, brother of Richard McKenny one of the framed prisoners, demonstrating with a comrade outside the British embassy in Moscow.

lieve that all of us, the oppressed throughout the world, share a common interest in winning our freedom.

The campaign for our release is politically neutral, in the sense that it appeals to all classes and sections of the population to support us; but although it is organised to highlight our particular case, or based on the 'single-issue' of our continuing imprisonment, it should also be an instrument of mobilisation around the whole question of Britain's military involvement in Northern Ireland - the real backdrop, so to speak, of our case.

Have you or your campaign received much open support from the Catholic Church?

We've had some degree of open support from the Catholic Church in the Irish free-state, people like Cardinal O Fiaich and Bishop Edward Daly, in particular, have been very good; but of course the Catholic Church hierarchy throughout the world is inherently conservative, and the Irish church is no exception. As far as the Catholic Church in England is concerned, forget it, we've received absolutely no support at all from that quarter. As far as I'm concerned Cardinal Hume is an Englishman first and a Catholic second; in other words his ultimate and real loyalty lies first and foremost with the British political establishment. He hasn't shown the least interest in our case and has never once commented on it.

It seems to me that the Catholic Church in England is very good and enthusiastic about condemning socialist or left-wing governments around the world, but when it comes to speaking out against injustice in this country it seems to maintain a very conspicuous silence indeed. In my honest opinion, the Church here in England is little more than a lackey of the state, a mouthpiece of the well-off and powerful. Look at its track record: it fully and openly supports Britain's involvement in Ireland, and has never done anything whatsoever to improve the conditions of Irish political prisoners in this country. I really can't adequately express the extent of my anger at the sheer hypocrisy of the Catholic Church in this country.

You've now been in prison 14 years; how are you treated by the prison authorities?

Well, let's be absolutely clear about the fact that the prison authorities are fully aware of my innocence, they always have been; but of course they continue to keep me locked up.

It's very difficult for me to describe the pain and anguish of being an innocent person locked up in prison for life; the agony and fear of growing older in this place, of watching and feeling my life pass away when I know deep in my heart that I committed no crime. After 14 years in prison that agony is becoming progressively worse. Prison is a killer - everything about it is designed to kill and destroy the human being; and if it wasn't for the love and support of my family, which itself encourages a continuing sense of hope, I'm not sure that I could have survived the last 14 years of this hell. The support of other prisoners also has been an important factor in my survival here.

I often reflect on that now infamous statement by Lord Denning in which he said, in relation to our case, that it was better that innocent people should remain in prison rather than the integrity of the establishment be called into question, and I start to fear that maybe I'll be here in prison for eternity. That's why it's so vitally important that we receive the help and support of ordinary people as well as sympathetic and progressive governments. Without that support the truth about our case will forever be ignored or denied by the British government, and we shall remain and probably die in prison. ■

AAM sectarianism increases

ANDY HIGGINBOTTOM

The intervention of the RCG and a growing number of local AA groups ensured that the Anti-Apartheid Movement's failure to support all forces fighting apartheid was the central issue at its Annual General Meeting held in Sheffield on 26-27 November.

A composite motion proposed by London RCG, the Greenwich & Bexley and Stockport AA groups moved that the AAM: 'continue its cooperation with the ANC and SWAPO; invite representatives of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, Black Consciousness Movement of Azania and the South West Africa National Union onto AAM public platforms and cooperate fully with these organisations' and 'make contact with and report ... the activities of the United Democratic Front, the Azanian People's Organisation, the Cape Action League, and all the others of the 17 [banned] organisations'.

Speaking for the RCG, Andy Higginbottom challenged the AAM to campaign for the release of PAC leader Zeph Mothopeng as well as ANC leader Nelson Mandela. The reactionary core of the AAM leadership's position was blurred out by Munir Malik, chair of the AAM London Committee, who claimed that the reason Mandela was not released was the threat of violence from other anti-apartheid groups. Thus the AAM echoes the racist regime. The motion fell. Meanwhile the AAM was demonstrating its hostility to AZAPO and SWANU: comrades from both organisations were denied entry by AAM Executive Secretary Mike Terry.

We carried the battle over into the trade union sphere, urging solidarity with all trade union organisations in South Africa

opposed to the apartheid system, including specifically the two federations COSATU and NACTU. We proposed a campaign in support of Moses Mayekiso, the BTR strikers and the NUM 3 on death row. The AAM's Executive Committee representative Alan Brooks succeeded in his call to reject this motion. As we pointed out in the debate, the AAM is seeking to impose disunity on the trade unions by denying solidarity to the NACTU wing of the movement.

The increasing sectarianism of the AAM goes hand in hand with its shift to the right. AAM Treasurer Vella Pillay defended his appeal to the Monopolies Commission to block Anglo-American's attempted takeover bid of Consolidated Goldfields, on the grounds that it 'contravenes the principles of free competition' and would 'clearly be contrary to the interests of the United Kingdom'. An emergency motion from the RCG, which condemned the AAM's executive 'for making a distinction on patriotic lines between a British company and a South African company both of which brutally exploit black workers', was voted down.

Manchester RCG successfully moved a motion in support of the campaign against South African Airways (initiated by City AA, and by the RCG in Manchester), and in support of our comrade Viraj Mendis which commits the AAM to send a delegation to the Home Secretary. The Executive Committee moved the deletion of the point that AA News reserve a monthly column on Viraj's situation. Black communists are to be seen but not heard.

The AGM took a report from its Executive and Women's Committee which noted: 'Only six of the thirty individual members of the National Committee ... [are] women, only 2

of the 8 elected Executive members, and none of the Officers'.

The spirit of self-criticism did not extend to the debate on women fighting apartheid. It was here that the sectarian chickens came home to roost. Birmingham AA proposed the AAM 'support any campaign initiated by women of South Africa and Namibia fighting for the right to control their own bodies' in recognition of the women who are obliged to have dangerous illegal abortions. A delegate from Haringey AA argued against this amendment on the grounds that any initiative must go through the AAM, the ANC and SWAPO. The AGM came to life. Two black women, and other women who had not planned to speak, rose up in protest that facilities and help might be denied. RCG delegate Lorna Reid drove the point home that Haringey's opposition was the practical consequence of the AAM leadership's sectarian refusal to support all the organisations of the oppressed. Pointing to the all male front bench of the platform, she demanded, 'Are black women to wait on the permission of Mike and Bob before they can get a safe abortion?' Birmingham's amendment was passed.

In the one area where a substantial section of the AGM's delegates could identify with the oppressed, on the basis of their own experience as women, the sectarianism of the AAM broke down. Non-sectarianism is an important democratic principle; it accords with the identity of interest between the working class and oppressed in Britain and Southern Africa in fighting to destroy all privileges and all exploitation. It is up to the black people of South Africa/Azania and Namibia to decide their movements and leaders, not the AAM. ■

ORGANISE WITH FRFI!

Defending MARXISM



In November and December we have been holding our FRFI Readers and Supporters Groups up and down the country. At these meetings we discussed themes central to communist politics.

Our first meetings were held around the media ban on Sinn Féin: we argued that the ban and the denial of the right to silence for Irish people in court were the latest steps in a series of repressive measures taken against the Republican Movement under the Anglo-Irish Deal. It is both the right of the Irish people to voice their opposition to British rule and the right of the British working class to hear their viewpoint. The ban on the voice of the Irish people serves only the interests of the British ruling class. To defend their own right to speak out against rising poverty and repression the working class must oppose the ban. Their opposition cannot be confined to or constrained by either the Labour Party or the official trade union movement as the unprincipled retreat by the National Union of Journalists has shown.

Those attending our meetings heard recorded messages from Gerry Adams, Sinn Féin MP, and Sean Mac Stiofain, former Chief of Staff of IRA. Sean Mac Stiofain called for greater distribution of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* as a means of informing the British working class of the fight for national liberation in Ireland.

Our second meetings were held on 'The Political Economy of Thatcherism'. The introductions stressed the inherent contradiction of capitalism expressed by the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. This makes capitalism prone to periods of crisis. What we have been witnessing today is the ruling class's attempt to solve the crisis at the expense of the working class, starting with the poorest sections. Thatcher launched a programme to restore the economy through overseas investment, privatisation, attacks on the welfare state and increased unemployment to aid the profitability of the private sector.

As part of her economic programme, Thatcher has continued to nourish the material and

political split in the working class whilst savagely attacking its poorest and most oppressed sections. However, to recover from the effects of the crisis Thatcher will be forced to attack wider sections of the working class. The political hold of the Labour Party on the working class will be the main obstacle to mounting a serious challenge to Thatcher and exploiting the effects on the ruling class from the current crisis.

Our third meetings on 'Fidel Castro - In Defence of Marxism' follow closely the argument in *FRFI 82*. These meetings have been held in London only and will be held elsewhere in January 1989.

Our Readers and Supporters Groups in January include meetings on the topic of Britain's Political Prisoners.

FRFI Readers and Supporters Groups are being held to educate and discuss communist politics central to advancing the interests and struggles of the British working class.

Lorna Reid

Smash the Poll Tax

The National Action Conference Against the Poll Tax on 10 December was attended by 200 people. The conference had been initiated by the RCG at the Socialist Conference in June 1988. RCG members fought on the organising committee for the conference to represent the broadest possible participation in the campaign against the Poll Tax.

We argued successfully for the conference to allow maximum time for discussion and debate and place no restrictions on the right of organisations to distribute their literature. However, our overall argument, that those active in resisting the Poll Tax at every level be mobilised to attend was, in practice, subverted. Unfortunately the majority of those attending the conference did not represent the resistance being carried out within the communities.

The main resolution submitted by the Conference Organising Committee called for mass opposition to the Poll Tax at every level, through community and tenants' groups and all labour movement organisations, and support for campaigns against registration, im-

plementation and payment. It called for the setting up of Committees of 100, following the example of the campaign in Scotland. We supported the resolution as a basis for building an effective campaign. Our amendment calling for an organising committee to be elected to carry out the aims of the conference was accepted.

The RCG participated in the discussions and the workshops and Lorna Reid spoke for us on the platform. We argued for a broadbased, democratic, militant campaign independent of the Labour Party and official trade union movement, committed to resistance by all means, legal and illegal.

The potential of the conference to provide a lead for all those involved in resisting the Poll Tax was undermined because of the role played by the SWP. In every discussion they sought to restrict the call for action to the trade union movement. In the workshop around civil disobedience they argued that non-registration and non-payment would not succeed and that only trade union action against implementation could defeat the Poll Tax.

David Reed replied to this saying that if we listened to the SWP we might as well go home. He drew attention to the lessons to be learnt from the movement against apartheid in South Africa, where resistance was built from the actions of the community drawing support from the trade unions. Today the trade unions are in the forefront of that struggle, supported by the community. That unity has to be built here if we are to defeat the Poll Tax. We require a new political movement, using new methods. His contribution was applauded.

The SWP were not alone in their retreat from non-payment. The ILP moved an amendment to the main resolution to delete all, in favour of urging the TUC/Labour National Executive Committees to organise a demonstration against the Poll Tax in April.

The main resolution was passed, amended by the SWP to delete support for Committees of 100 pledged to non-payment, in favour of support for non-implementation by trade unionists. RCG members and supporters are participating in the organising committee. ■ Lorna Reid

FIGHT RACISM!
FIGHT IMPERIALISM!



Readers Supporters Groups

I would like to know about the Readers and Supporters Group in my area:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

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LONDON WC1N 3XX

BRITISH WITHDRAWAL FROM IRELAND: on the anniversary of Bloody Sunday demonstrate against British repression in Ireland. Demonstrate for British withdrawal from Ireland. Grange Park, Kilburn, London. Saturday 28 January 1989.

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! Readers and Supporters Groups

'BRITAIN'S POLITICAL PRISONERS'

South London:
10 January 7.30pm
Station Pub, 296a Camberwell New Road, London SE5

North London:
10 January 7.30pm
Red Rose Club, 129 Seven Sisters Road, N4

Bradford:
Tuesday 24 January 7.30pm
Bradford Central Library

Manchester:
'DEFEND THE NHS'
5 January 7.30pm
Committee Room 4, Manchester Town Hall
'FIDEL CASTRO - IN DEFENCE OF MARXISM'
19 January 7.30pm
Mother Macs, Back of Piccadilly (behind Spud-U-Like)

For details of meetings in other areas write to FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

COMMUNIST FORUMS ON South Africa

Sunday 22 January 6.30pm
Marchmont Community Centre, Marchmont Street, London WC1
'Gold, apartheid and British collaboration'
Speakers: Carol Brickley and David Reed

New RCG leaflet on the Poll Tax. Copies available from FRFI. Donations welcome.



1000 days and nights for freedom

On Saturday 14 January, City of London Anti-Apartheid Group celebrates 1000 days and nights of the Non-Stop Picket. They aim to hold a mass picket all day. All supporters are asked to pledge an hour (or more!). For more details contact:

City AA, BM City AA, London WC1N 3XX
Telephone 01-837 6050

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Miners Strike 1984-85 People versus State by David Reed and Olivia Adamson. 144pp, special offer £1 plus 40p p&p

South Africa: Britain out of Apartheid! Apartheid out of Britain! by Carol Brickley, Terry O'Halloran and David Reed. 64pp, 95p plus 30p p&p

New pamphlet: Viraj Mendis Life or Death? Edited by Eddie Abrahams and Viraj Mendis. 48pp, £1.50 plus 30p p&p

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- Take the side of all those struggling against imperialism - **Join the RCG!**
- A movement must be built here in Britain which stands with the oppressed fighting racism, repression and poverty. Help us build this movement - **Join the RCG!**
- A movement must be built which challenges and defeats the treachery of the opportunist leaders of Britain's Labour and trade union movement - **Join the RCG!**

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Two Irishmen imprisoned in West Germany

On 19 November over 400 people attended an 'Irish Evening' in Frankfurt to raise money towards the high legal costs needed for the defence of 2 Irish prisoners held in West German high security prisons.

After their arrest at the end of August, Terence (Gerry) McGeough and Gerard Hanratty were immediately separated and are being held in isolation cells under the harshest prison conditions - they are locked in their cells 23 hours a day, all contact with other prisoners is forbidden (even during the exercise hour), they must wear prison clothing, etc. Total isolation is achieved by the fact that neither of the two prisoners speak any German.

West Germany has a definite interest in seeing the conflict in the 6 Counties resolved in favour of Britain. The 'European Union' among the Common Market nations planned for the magical year 1992 foresees a mobilisation of the state security apparatus to combat Europe's internal and peripheral 'enemies' - whether they come from Ireland, Euskadi, Turkey/Kurdistan or Palestine. Surely it is no coincidence that the West German security authorities should be holding on remand prisoners from Kurdistan, Ireland and Palestine under a whole host of 'terrorist' charges, 'conspiracies' and other 'extremist activities'. Only a 'pacified' Europe can become the mighty power block envisaged by the imperialist West European leaders.

Send cards and solidarity greetings to the two prisoners! Gerry McGeough, JVA Frankenthal Gerard Hanratty, JVA Keisheim/Bayern All letters must be sent via: Ermittlungsrichter am Bundesgerichtshof, Herrenstrasse 45a, 7500 KARLSRUHE, West Germany. LIZ PALM West Germany

Nurses on the frontline

Nurses in Manchester were in the forefront of the fight against the regrading swindle. Nurses at Springfield psychiatric hospital were on strike for 4 weeks and the nurses in NUPE at the nearby Prestwich hospital were on strike for 3 weeks. Many lessons were learnt during the strikes and although the nurses did not succeed in their objective of sparking off national strike action the strikes were a success in the sense that they provided a lead to the rest of the country and there is hardly a health authority which was not affected by temporary stoppages or work to grades as nurses expressed their anger at the deal. For many nurses it is the first time they have become confident in their collective strength.

A series of indefinite nurses' strikes up and down the country were needed to win the dispute and force Kenneth Clarke to back down and allocate more money and allow nurses to be upgraded *en masse*. But this was not achieved, partly due to the opposition of the COHSE and NUPE officials who concentrated

instead on a tame lobby of Tory MPs in Parliament. They tried to stop striking nurses speaking at rallies and nurses' meetings on several occasions.

Unfortunately many nurses have illusions in the appeals procedures. At Prestwich this was shown when COHSE members who had joined the indefinite strike action went back to work after only 10 days. Their branch officials made a deal with management that if they called off the strike they would be allowed to participate in a joint appeals review committee. The members voted narrowly to return to work on this basis. NUPE nurses who are in a minority at Prestwich were then left isolated and so we had to return to work soon afterwards. Shortly afterwards the correctness of our stand was indicated when we obtained a leaked copy of the Regional Health Authority guidelines to management involved in appeals. We asked management if they would be following these guidelines and they said they would. The guidelines allow no room for anyone to be upgraded. It means in effect that the appeals are rigged from the start. NUPE decided not to participate in the joint review committees since management have a veto on anyone being upgraded. In any case, everyone knows that there is no extra money for successful appeals.

Another lesson of the strike was the way in which the government are using the anti-union laws to outlaw opposition to their role. Nurses were threatened with these laws being used and if the strikes had spread the government might have taken nurses and their unions to court. But if defending the health service, either by opposing cuts or fighting for decent pay, is to be illegal then we can think of no better reason for breaking the law.

At Prestwich hospital the biggest section of nursing staff are nursing assistants, who were given the lowest grade, grade A. They got rises of between £435-445 a year. The starting salary for an NA is now £5000 a year. Another section who have been badly treated are sisters and charge nurses, the majority of these got a grade F giving them rises of only 4.3%. Many of these staff have 10 or 20 years' experience in their posts but have still been given the lowest grades possible. The health unions should have fought for a big pay rise for all nurses instead of going along with the divisive grading structure. Nurses' pay is set by a government-appointed Pay Review Body and ordinary nurses do not get a vote on whether they accept or reject what is on offer. The unions should leave the Pay Review Body.

At their last branch meeting NUPE members passed a resolution for the next NUPE conference calling for grades for NAs to be scrapped and demanding the union fight for a minimum starting salary of £7000 a year for all nursing assistants, this is equivalent to a grade C. STUART CARTER NUPE shop steward, Prestwich Hospital

Political preparation

After reading the editorial in *FRFI* 82 I have the following thoughts. The organised elements of the British working class have set themselves up as a shining example of what they think the rest of the working class should follow (those that are able to). It is not so much the fact that they have abandoned traditional Marxist theory. They have totally

rejected the basics of Marxism/Leninism and they openly try to emulate the capitalists who use them as a tool of the divide and rule policy they have always adhered to.

The new realists are guilty of the worst crime of all and that is the crime of spreading defeatism and reactionary illusions to the proletariat who are suffering ruthlessly in Thatcher's economic nightmare.

As you say the RCG must be politically prepared to accept a mass influx of working class people into its ranks and to educate people as to the only possible solution to their problems and that is the overthrow of capitalism and the setting up of a socialist state. The RCG qualifies as just such an organisation to lead the people in the fight against oppression. Just as the Communist Party of Germany did in 1918.

All of the other so called left wing organisations are worth nothing in the coming fight. They only care about the lower ranks of the middle class and the so called privileged sections of the working class. As all politicians are vote-orientated they will openly betray and disown the truly oppressed sections of the community when the Poll Tax comes into force. The reason being that whole sections of society who are unable to pay will be taken off the electoral register. When this happens the so called left will abandon them as useless. But it is precisely these people who the RCG must look to educate in revolutionary theory.

As true communists cannot believe in a parliamentary process, we must be fully prepared to promote the destruction of the capitalist state when the time is right by revolution. And as Marx said 'revolution will be brought about by the crisis in capitalism'. Thatcher's economic plans will bring about such a crisis and we must be fully prepared to seize and fully exploit the movement before the reactionaries defeat us and prop up the state.

As you say the rest of the left has taken to criticising the Soviet Union and its policies. The Soviet Union is the mother and the protector of all freedom of the proletariat and this must never be forgotten.

The RCG is the only left wing organisation that has as part of its aims to bring together all of the representative groups of oppressed people, internationally united. As our major enemies are huge multi-national corporations and the power they hold, communists must also be international in their outlook and work.

It is also very true that the failure of the traitorous left wing can be blamed for the recent repressive legislation concerning publicity for the Irish fighters and the removal of the right to silence.

I support the RCG in every way in your aims to bring into existence a socialist state and in your coming fight to destroy this cult of new realism as it is a dangerous enemy of the working class. New realism can only be seen as the forerunner of what was once called National Socialism, and history tells us what nightmare of applied terror that turned out to be. But the symptoms are alarmingly similar. Except that with the Thatcher government the roots of such organisation have been actively encouraged and both the Tories and the established Labour Party have moved steadily towards the extreme right at a steady pace over the years even when hidden behind such things as a campaign for the return to Victorian values. Yours in the struggle, LIAM TIERNEY HM Prison Hornby Road, Liverpool.

Support for Irish prisoners

I am a republican prisoner here in the H-blocks. I have read some of your material and wish to thank you for highlighting our struggle against British imperialism in my country. As you may know the British have sought in the past to manipulate Irish prisoners, to degrade and demean the Irish struggle as a whole, this has been shown many times: internment, the introduction of the criminalisation policy in 1974, which led to legitimate prisoners of war being portrayed as criminals and by extension the Irish struggle for national self-determination as criminal. These policies brought about the Blanket Protest and more recently the death of ten of our comrades on hungerstrike. Men spent years in inhuman conditions and eventually died to lay low this title of criminal.

Once again we are seeing Irish prisoners being used by Britain, namely, the life sentenced prisoners, some of whom have served 17 years with no sign of release, and indeed will have none until the powers that be have decided we are broken men and women who will no longer resist oppression. In response, we the prisoners and our relatives have launched a campaign to highlight the fact that life prisoners are being held as political hostages.

It is in relation to this campaign that I am writing to you: we have in progress a letter campaign to inform people about what is happening here. We are writing to politicians, newspapers, magazines, reporters, television, trade unions, and indeed anyone whom we feel may be of some use in bringing pressure to bear. We now feel we should broaden this out to include other countries of which yours is one.

We would like to ask for your help in gathering the information which we need to be effective in your country, namely, if you could supply us with the names and addresses of the types of things mentioned above. I would like to take this opportunity to stress the importance of what we are doing here, together we may help prevent Irish prisoners from spending 20 years or more in jail for what are obviously political reasons (although the British would deny this!), together we can win this issue. Another issue of the Irish conflict. Could I just take some time to explain my use of the term 'political hostage' by using a few examples: Private Ian Thain is a member of the British army who was given a life sentence for the killing of a young Irish man, he served 26 months and was given his job back; Kevin McGrady was a paid perjurer who was involved in 3 individual killings but because he had lied in court for the British, he only served 6 years of his 3 life sentences.

In contrast to this we have Brendan Lillie who was given a life sentence for an explosion in which no one was killed and has served 12 years with no sign of release. Brendan Malloy who was under 18 when given a life sentence has now served 17 years with no sign of release. I hope from this you can see how important your help is. If you would like more information, could you please contact: Mary Hardy, 5/7 Conway Mill, Conway Street, Belfast. Could you also send her any information you may collect. If at all possible could you write to me and let me know you received my letter?

Thank you, RAB HENRY H-Blocks

Palestine Now!

Imperialists conspire against revolution

Recent developments in Palestine —

- the PNC's 15 November declaration of a Palestinian state and its recognition of Israel and UN Resolution 242;
- the US Administration's decision to open a 'substantive dialogue' with the PLO; and
- the Thatcher government's support for the PLO's presence at an international conference organised by the UN are all products of the uprising against Zionism in Palestine. The outstanding feature of this uprising, that lends it determination, energy, ingenuity and stubbornness, is that while it still involves all classes, it is sustained primarily by the dispossessed, by the people of no property.

The Observer noted that:

'... most of the blood being spilt does not belong to the merchant class. It flows from the rough boys whose families never got out of the refugee camps. They are the real dispossessed.'

The uprising is assuming the form of a prolonged people's insurrection. The leading role of the dispossessed, the workers and peasants, who have no interest in compromising with Zionism and imperialism, presents the greatest threat to imperialism. For it has the potential to galvanise the millions of oppressed masses in the Arab world to fight not only against Zionism but against the very foundations of imperialism and capitalism in the region.

EDDIE ABRAHAMS

It is in order to destroy the revolutionary character of the uprising that the Arab bourgeoisie and imperialism have put unprecedented pressure on the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to recognise Israel, guarantee its permanent existence and abandon 'terrorism' — ie the revolutionary and armed struggle.

UN RESOLUTION 242

Just as the Intifada was entering its second year, the Palestine National Council (PNC — the Palestinian Parliament) in November 1988, following bitter debate, voted to accept UN Resolution 242. This resolution, previously universally condemned, recognises Israel and its security needs,



but refers to the Palestinian question merely as a refugee problem. The vote, with 253 in favour, 56 against and 10 abstentions, was a major victory for the right wing of the PLO.

The left wing, led by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine fought against acceptance. Its leader George Habash said:

'After the Intifada, Israel should be making the concessions not us.'

Nevertheless Yassir Arafat, Chairman of the PLO, reiterated the PLO's new line at the UN General Assembly

on 13 December and at a press conference the day after at which he said:

'I repeat, for the record, that we totally and absolutely renounce all forms of terrorism, including individual, group and state terrorism.'

The Palestinian movement is caught in a terrible dilemma. The uprising remains isolated from the Arab masses in surrounding countries and has no support from the working class in the imperialist countries. There is therefore enormous pressure

on a section of the PLO leadership to achieve some form of state on the West Bank. By means of the PLO's new 'moderate' and 'realistic' position, Yassir Arafat hopes to persuade imperialism to force Israel to the negotiating table and to accept a two-state solution.

IMPERIALIST CONSPIRACY

Imperialism, however, is incapable of playing a progressive role. It is not about to force its main and most reliable ally in the region to compromise with the Palestinians and settle for two states in the region — one Israeli the other Palestinian — which could create new and unforeseen problems for imperialism. None of the imperialist powers are about to recognise the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

The US and British governments, by making no more than gestures towards the PLO and by appearing ready to negotiate with it, are attempting to keep their options open in the event that Zionism fails to quell the uprising of the masses.

Zionism cannot forever fend off the rising tide of the Palestinian uprising. The imperialists, particularly the British, have long experience in dealing with the bourgeois forces within national liberation movements. By their recent initiatives and redoubled talk of 'negotiations' and 'political solutions' they are trying to secure the political forces necessary for a neo-colonial, bantustan-like solution should this be necessary.

If ever the imperialists, to defend their own interests, have to force the Israelis to the negotiating table for a two-state solution, they want the Arab and Palestinian bourgeoisie to act as guarantors not just for counter-revolutionary Zionism but also for imperialist capital in the region. But this does not mean any pressure on the Zionists to halt the savage repression in Palestine. The imperialists are merely unsure that this repression will work.

The Palestinian masses will not allow the imperialists and the Arab bourgeoisie to destroy the uprising and the Palestinian revolution. After the PNC, George Habash said to those who thought imperialism could be forced to play a progressive role:

'Go ahead and try. We are confident you will come back and we will use another path.' ■

Eyewitness in Palestine

Below we print an article contributed to *FRFI* by a reader who recently visited occupied Palestine.

Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza regard the recent declaration by the Palestinian National Council (PNC) in Algiers as a direct result of their Intifada, now 12 months old. There were euphoric celebrations everywhere despite Israeli attempts to thwart them: the West Bank was under curfew for four days and Gaza for six days, power and 'phone lines were disconnected to prevent information getting in or out. Journalists were banned from the occupied territories. Nevertheless Palestinians plugged their TVs into car batteries to watch the PNC, the streets were festooned with Palestinian flags and home-made fireworks were set off.

Repression continues unabated as villages and refugee camps are frequently placed under curfew for weeks at a time cut off from food and medical supplies. Their crops are either destroyed by the soldiers or left

to rot in the fields. In Ibna, a village near Hebron, the military even arrested 20 donkeys during a curfew to prevent them being used to smuggle food into the village!

House demolition is used to punish the families of people arrested for political activities. In Jericho I met a woman whose five sons had been arrested after the bombing of an Israeli bus. Her home had been demolished, her mother's home had been demolished and her uncle's home had been demolished. The whole family were living in tents. Altogether six homes were destroyed and 40 people arrested for an incident that many suspect was a pre-election publicity stunt by supporters of the Israeli Likud party.

Palestinians have learnt to live with the daily fear of arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. There are now 14,000 detainees in the West Bank and Gaza. The schools, closed for the past 12 months, have been commandeered for temporary prisons and military outposts. 27 Palestinian leaders have been deported and a further six are awaiting deportation.

The number of Palestinians killed

is now over 400 with thousands more suffering serious injuries. In Gaza, 3,000 of the injured are children under the age of 15 years. One hospital reported 80 children being brought in on the same day as a result of beatings. Another hospital treated 350 children after Israeli soldiers threw tear gas into their school. In Gaza's Jabaliya refugee camp the military presence is overwhelming but not enough to daunt the militancy of the inhabitants who organise demonstrations almost daily. When I visited the UNWRA clinic in Jabaliya camp, the building was echoing with the screams of a four year old child shot in the leg by a plastic bullet. One doctor, who treats on average ten people daily for tear gas poisoning, told me that the Israelis now use six different types of tear gas making it impossible for him to prescribe treatment. One family I met were mourning the death of their three week old baby, killed by tear gas thrown into their cramped one roomed home.

Such suffering, however, serves to strengthen Palestinian determination to free themselves from the Israeli military occupation. Of vital importance in the Intifada are the popular committees. The most visible of these are the strike and defence committees run by the 'shebab' or young men. They organise demonstrations, stone throwing and the de-

fence of the villages and camps against army attacks. The shebab are the most vulnerable members of the community and always sleep away from their homes to avoid arrest. The smuggling committees arrange for food and other supplies to be got into camps and villages under curfew. Other committees deal with education, agriculture and provision for the families of martyrs, those in prison and those deported. Membership of a popular committee carries a penalty of ten years' imprisonment.

The Intifada which started spontaneously has become, therefore, a highly planned and co-ordinated mass struggle. But Palestinians are under no illusion that the PNC declaration will improve their situation in the short term. Israel has moved even further to the right and the intransigence of its leaders is supported by the US. The Israeli Defence Minister, Rabin, said 'Our intention is to show that the resolutions in Algiers are meaningless'. Support for the Intifada inside Israel is limited, being confined to the (mainly Arab) Communist Party and a few very small left groups of no electoral significance. One Jewish supporter of the Palestinians told me that most Israelis are more worried about the banning of football matches on Saturdays than about the situation in the occupied territories. ■

